

ILKA CHASE

Three Men
on the Left Hand



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THREE MEN
ON THE LEFT HAND

One

T. DELAFIELD ASSOCIATES. The legend on a ground-glass door of an office building in New York's east fifties proclaimed the place of business of Miss Tansy Delafield, Public Relations Counsellor, or, in her own more modest phrase, Press agent.

Despite her reputation, solid if embryonic, Miss Delafield was felt in some quarters to be sneaky. It wasn't fair, some quarters said, usually feminine ones, to be as beautiful as all that and a capable business-woman too. Business-women should proclaim themselves; strong noses and big bones—or they should have didactic voices, something denoting authority. In a pinch they might be little and bustling, but not tall and slender with deep blue eyes, spiky lashes, and dark hair.

Tansy couldn't help her looks but she was culpable in the matter of her capacity. She tried to cultivate it, and like a well-tended garden it was coming along nicely.

Now, after fourteen months in business, in October, 1745, aided by a part-time assistant and a secretary, she found herself, with a slender but gratifying little margin, in the black.

Just as some people have a knack for mimicry or the gift of perfect pitch, Tansy had a flare for thinking up original yet sensible ways of getting publicity for others. Nothing made her happier than to have a client, because his name was well publicized, land a new job or make a record

sale. The power behind the throne, she would think with a pleased little grin, that's me. It gave her a cosy feeling.

Like any good entrepreneur she was jealous of the reputations she helped build and quick to spot a phoney dodge dreamed up by those who would exploit her clients for their own sordid ends.

At the moment she was coping single-handed with just such a chiseller.

"Thanks ever so much for thinking of us," she was saying over the phone, "but I don't feel that Miss Winters is quite the person for the iguana idea. After all, she's England's leading Shakespearean actress and I expect you saw the reviews of her *Lady Macbeth*. Raves, and only three days ago. I really can't see her photographed on Fifth Avenue with an iguana on a satin leash to publicize the new vogue in lizard shoes. . . . Yes, of course she wears shoes, but she's British and they're conservative. . . . Well it doesn't do any good to run down brogues, does it, they've been popular for years. . . . Why don't you try somebody like Gertrude Lawrence, someone more giddy or chic than Naomi Winters. . . . Not at all. Call me again sometime. Always glad to oblige if we can."

She hung up and turned to her friend, Nora Bailey, who, having time on her hands between her hairdresser's appointment and her luncheon engagement, had dropped in for a chat. "How do you like that?" Tansy demanded. "The Weinberg shoe people have rented a great fat lizard from the zoo and they want Winters to pose with him. In the first place she'd be terrified. She'd think those post-performance brandies had caught up with her, and in the second place you can't say she's very clothes-conscious. She doesn't actually dress; she dons garments."

Nora laughed. "Why on earth should they have thought of her?"

"She's a big name and they read the reviews."

"Still, the idea's so incongruous it might get a lot of space."

Tansy shook her head. "I don't think it's right. You know they say publicity gets it in and public relations keeps it out. Today I'm grand and have on my public relations hat. The idea we want to create about Winters is one of dignity. Not old-fashioned Shakespearean ham, but the real thing. Coupled with fire. A strong, fiery woman, passionate yet dignified. An Anglo-Saxon Katina Paxinou, that's how I see her."

Nora smiled affectionately. "It's a neat trick, but if that's how you see her the public will too. You're a smart cookie. Miss Winters will owe you a lot. I've told Josh more than once he ought to let you handle publicity for him. I bet you could do as much for him as Ivy Lee did for the Rockefellers."

"Good Lord!" Tansy protested. "Josh doesn't want me. Besides, it's a different set-up. Everybody knew about the Rockefellers. They just needed to be loved. Josh is more like Andrew Mellon. I read some place that Mellon was practically a secret billionaire. Even men who worked for him didn't know who the boss was. Josh is like that, agin publicity. With all his zillions, I bet you an awful lot of people have never heard of him."

"Yes, I imagine there are a good many to whom Josh would come as quite a shock," Nora said drily. "Sometimes he comes as quite a shock to me. Men are supposed to confide in their lady loves, but time and again it's been something Jake Greenleaf or one of the other boys let drop that's

given me an inkling of what he's up to rather than anything he says."

"There you are," Tansy said absently. She was leafing through some tear-sheets on her desk, mostly women's pages from out-of-town newspapers. "It's extraordinary how this spice business has caught on. All the cooking columns are using it and it even turns up in travel columns. The country's redolent with ginger and cinnamon and cummin seed." She gave a happy sniff and tossed the papers aside. "When I get my next cheque from the aromatics I'll be able to pay Josh the final instalment on what I owe him."

"You've been wonderful about that, Tan," Nora said. "There's not a woman in a thousand who'd think she had to pay him back. They'd think that twenty-five hundred to him was no more than a drop in the bucket. Or they'd pretend to and go all feminine and vague."

"I believe in paying my debts," Tansy said. "You never know when you might have to borrow again. Besides, rich people are different from us. They see money through a magnifying glass. To Josh it isn't twenty-five hundred dollars. It's the sum you have to have invested to get dividends amounting to that. Also, he was nice about the way he lent it to me, very freely. It was I who insisted on signing an I.O.U. I wanted everything business-like."

"No strings attached, eh?"

"Not a thread."

Nora looked at her searchingly, her mouth set in a bitter line. Presently she shrugged. "I believe you did get away with it. Josh swears you did, but then he's such a liar."

"Nora, there's nothing between Josh and me, there never has been. You know that quite well. I'm fond of him,

but not like that. I've known him all my life, don't forget. I too know what he's like."

Nora turned away. "I'm sorry," she said miserably. "I don't mean to sound like a bitch. It's just . . ." Her voice trailed off.

"Darling, don't be ridiculous. My vague relation is a problem child. We have to accept him as such."

The connection she referred to was, to be sure, tenuous. Joshua Buell Hutchinson was a cousin of Tansy's dead stepfather, Ralph Hamilton. The family had lived in Cleveland and Josh first met her there when she was a little girl and he was in the city on a business trip. After his cousin's death, as she grew older and more beautiful, whenever his affairs took him that way he made a point of calling on her and her mother.

The day he learned of her ambition to work in New York he said at once that she must come to see him. If she wanted a job, there might be an opening in his office. If not he would be happy to introduce her to friends who could undoubtedly place her.

It was this aspect of the offer Mrs. Hamilton advised her daughter to look into. Joshua's power and position were well known to her but so was his reputation. A job removed from his immediate orbit was the wish of most mothers. It was decidedly that of Lucy Hamilton. Her lovely child had grown into a strikingly beautiful girl with a slender but seductive figure, and although Joshua wore glasses, myopia was not his trouble.

Actually Mrs. Hamilton need not have worried. He approached Tansy as he automatically approached any attractive female the sunny side of fifty, but one night when he took her to dinner shortly after her arrival in New York,

he discovered a terrible flaw. She wasn't interested in him. His gigantic fortune, which she had known about since childhood, did not seem to hold for her the hypnotic appeal it held for every other member of her sex he had ever encountered. His power, his sophistication, his conservative appearance which frequently attracted even women wealthy in their own right—they thought him distinguished—made no dent on the flower from Ohio. She thought of him as her stepfather's cousin, an ageing gentleman thirty years her senior—who might help her get established in the business she had set her heart on.

At dinner that night at the Colony restaurant her beautiful eyes gazed into his, his hand moved, magnetized, across the table to touch the soft curve of her breast, her gentle voice was a lullaby. Unfortunately at this breathless moment her actual words struck his eardrum. "And so you see, Josh, with the few hundred dollars I've saved, if you *would* agree to a small long-term loan at five per cent, I could accept the offer to buy out that publicity firm I told you about. It's a solid little set-up with a couple of loyal accounts. The collateral would be the business itself."

Joshua's hand froze table centre between her wine glass and his. He was dining with a goddamn tycoon! A business woman! There was only one category of female to whom he didn't warm or, rather, who did not illuminate him, since warmth was no part of his make-up—and working women were it.

Labouring over his multiple and complex enterprises from nine till six, he had no intention of passing evenings as well discussing business. Still, Tansy, despite the shock she gave him, was beautiful. He was torn. If he helped her out

she would be obligated to him, she would consent to an affair. If she wasn't in love with him, so much the better. The nuisance value of love was high and Joshua far preferred a pretty light-weight of amiable disposition available when he wanted her for dinner, the theatre, and bed, to women of intelligence and heart. Get intelligence and heart and you get strings attached, had been his experience, and he wanted no entanglements. Nora Bailey, God knew, was tether enough what with really loving him and always wanting him to marry her.

Tansy, not caring, wouldn't twine herself around him like some damned ivy vine. Perhaps he had found Utopia: a lady whose lovely body could be enjoyed without complications.

He sipped his Château Ausone, gazed with a professional eye upon the beautiful creature opposite, and a glow spread through him. He was scarcely to be blamed for his complacency. After all, he didn't get around much in circles where chastity was considered an attribute. Besides, why should Tansy refuse one over whose cradle the fairies had hovered so lavishly?

His appearance, perhaps, was unexceptional; height five feet ten; hair pepper and salt, thinning; eyes pale behind steel-rimmed glasses, but not only was he one of the richest men in the world, physically he was admirably equipped with only a slight diminution of powers at the age of fifty-five. It was the conviction of envious associates that he enjoyed a form of satyriasis. While that was perhaps an exaggeration, he was notably able at man's work. This, plus his bank balance, naturally gave him a feeling of security, and he bore the weight of his far-flung enterprises with a buoyant air.

"Tansy," he said, "you shall have your loan." And his hand closed over hers.

Her eyes shone. "Oh, Josh! You angel? Thank you. Thank you. If there's anything in the world I can do for you, I will."

"You can," he assured her. "You can."

That was their first evening. Now, some fourteen months later, his buoyancy, deflated, had been replaced by resignation. Tansy, as she said, was paying him back his twenty-five hundred in small instalments and he had never become her lover.

He had been Nora Bailey's for several years. Whenever he thought about her. Both women knew him to be a notorious chaser but it was Nora's fate truly to love him. This caused her chronic unhappiness, but Joshua shared was better than no Joshua at all.

Tansy worried about her but at the moment it was her own love life rather than her friend's that was under discussion. The office phone was temporarily silent and the ladies had slipped imperceptibly from business to pleasure.

Their topic was a visitor Miss Delafield was expecting to pick her up for luncheon.

"Tell me about him," Nora urged, "is he ze grrreat rromance?"

Tansy's lazy full-bodied laughter rolled out. It was an extraordinary laugh better befitting a deep-bellied Buddha than a slender young woman, but she had had it all her life. She used sometimes to try to giggle in girlish fashion but the results were so distressing she would quickly revert to normal and anyone at once felt much more at ease.

"Well, it's romance but I'm not sure yet if it's ze grrreat. His name is Andy Hollister. In a curious way, though I've

known him for quite a time, I don't know him awfully well. In a way, of course, I suppose I know him well but I don't think that necessarily counts, do you?"

"The hay, you mean?"

"Mmmmm."

"No. Unless it's love I don't think it gives you a lien on a person."

"It's sort of love but he's never proposed to me. I saw him off and on through the war whenever he had leave and could get to New York, and I *like* him a lot. He's fun and nice and then, of course, there was all that fabulous business in the Normandy landings on D Day. I admit it made him seem terribly glamorous."

"Oh, he's the one," Nora said. "Oh, sure, now I know who you mean, the hero you've talked so much about!"

There was the merest flick of sarcasm in her tone but Tansy caught it. "You don't appreciate Andy, Nora. I forgive you because you don't know him but he's gentle and dear and he truly is a hero. 'For extraordinary heroism,' the dispatches said, and they don't give you a Distinguished Service Cross for nothing."

Nora smiled. "Look, Chick, you don't have to break a lance in his defence. I'm willing to believe he's the greatest thing since Sergeant York. I'm just hoping he's good for the long haul. Sometimes it takes a whole lot more courage to get through the daily grind than to spit in the teeth of the enemy."

"Why should you think he hasn't got staying power?"

"I'm only asking. I know you. I know you find heroism irresistible and I just mean don't get carried away by the glamour if there isn't something solid underneath."

"Don't worry. With Andy there is, I'm sure of it."

"Have you ever seen him out of uniform?"

"Well, under the circumstances, obviously, but never in civilian clothes."

"Then watch it. You may be in for a rude shock. My theory is if there weren't any uniforms there wouldn't be any wars. Can you imagine how rag tag and bob tail all those guys would look marching and flying around in their civilian clothes? They'd be so mangy the whole effort would collapse, and a damn good thing too."

Tansy laughed. "I expect Andy is still in uniform but when he called and asked me to lunch with him he said he had big news. My hope is he'll know when he can get out of the Army and whether or not he can stay here in town. He's anxious to get a job in New York and maybe he has, maybe that's what he's going to tell me."

Nora tamped out a cigarette. "What about that old beau of yours, you've sometimes talked about?" she asked casually. "Cass something or other, the fellow who works for World Press Service?"

"Cass Hanophy? What about him?"

"From what you said I thought you two were mad keen for each other when you used to live in Cleveland."

"Nora, that was a long time ago. Six years at least. We were kids. Cass has been a war correspondent all over the world. At first we used to write but it's been three years since I've even heard from him, let alone seen him."

"Well," said Nora rising, "it's none of my business but now that the doves of peace are dropping feathers and what'sit all over the place maybe he'll show up again. I always thought he sounded kind of nice. Homey but bright. If he covered all those war fronts maybe he's a hero too."

Tansy laughed. "Now who's the incorrigible romanticist?"

Nora gathered her minks about her preparatory to leaving. Joshua Buell Hutchinson noted financier was an unsatisfactory lover in many respects but he had learned a few of the basic fundamentals. Compulsively unfaithful though he was to Nora even he adhered to the general premise that she was his official mistress. Despite the war he had been able to garner a Chrysler Imperial for her and the minks had been his last Christmas present. Nora liked them very much but had come to the conclusion there was something the matter with the American dream. Minks and a Chrysler and a deep freeze, and she still was not happy.

That didn't mean, however, that she didn't cherish a hope of happiness for her younger friend. She leaned over and pressed her cheek against Tansy's. "Goodbye, sweetie. Have fun anyway. It's just that I want to see you pick a winner." She went to the door.

"See you Saturday," Tansy called after her. "Don't forget you and Josh are dining with me."

"No danger. Who else is coming?"

"I hope Andy if he's still in town."

"Good. Tell him to wear his medals." Nora departed bumping into Lorraine Benham on the way out. The sight of her little round secretary brought Tansy's mind back to business.

"Lorraine, look. The man arrived just after you left, we're all set." She pointed to the newly installed postage meter. "Run a few envelopes through, I'm crazy to see it." Tansy was proud of the meter. She was doing publicity for the great Utrillo show at the Modern Museum and every

letter stamped by the machine bore the legend: "Visit The Utrillo Exhibition While In New York." "A small device but big coverage," she said gaily. "You'll be participating in the spread of culture, Lorraine." Lorraine grunted. The postage meter was one of life's lesser thrills though she supposed at that it was better than licking stamps.

Tansy went into the minute lavatory to freshen her make-up before lunch. She had just adjusted her hat to the most bewitching angle when promptly at one the office door opened and Lieutenant Hollister stood on the threshold. He was a tall, slight young man with crew cut brown hair, friendly brown eyes and a rather long upper lip. When he spoke you knew he came from well below the Mason Dixon line. He took one look at Tansy and grinned. "Honey, you sure are a sight for sore eyes." Lorraine tried to be discreet but she could not help observing that her employer looked prettier than ever as the brave soldier boy took both her hands, held one against his heart and kissed the other. There was a moment's pause while they gazed at each other and then Tansy said a little breathlessly that she was quite ready, he must be starving and they could go at once. Lorraine saw them off with a slight pang. Her Jimmy was all very well but she did wish he could have been a 4-F for some reason other than diabetes.

About three o'clock Tansy returned to the office, and both Lorraine and Riva Smith, the assistant, noticed that she looked pale and seemed curiously subdued. Trying to enliven her, Lorraine remarked cheerily to Miss Smith that she'd missed it. "Our boss has a swell new beau. Cutest honey-sugar-you-all accent I ever heard."

"If you don't mind Lorraine, I'd rather not talk about him." Tansy's voice was sharp and the other two looked at

her in surprise. She was aware of their questioning eyes but she had had a shock. She couldn't quite bring herself to discuss Lieutenant Hollister. They were a hard working trio but they were young and concerned with love and had few secrets from each other when it came to the men in their lives. Still the boss was the boss and a metaphorical closed door could be quite as effective as a literal one if she didn't choose to talk.

It was nearly six when the others left, but Tansy stayed in the office until after eight. She had no engagement. After the Lieutenant's phone call inviting her to lunch she had purposely left the evening free. Always before when she had seen him they had spent as many hours together as possible. Automatically, she had assumed they would this time too.

It was not until she got home and was sitting up in bed trying to down a sandwich and a glass of milk that she allowed her thoughts to dwell squarely on their meeting. You might as well face it, my girl, she said to herself, staring across her drawn-up 'nees at her reflection in the mirror of her dressing table, you've been jilted. That pretty Miss Delafield, most popular member of her class, has got the gate.

Indeed there seemed no other name for it. Lieutenant Hollister had been genuinely glad to see her, had reiterated his gratitude for her loving kindness to him during his leaves throughout the war, and then had broken his great news.

Drawing a snapshot from his pocket he said, "Here she is Tan, this is Linda Sue, my girl in Thomasville." Tansy took the picture. Unaccustomed to southern hyphens, she half expected to be looking at Miss Soo, the daughter of

Chinese parents. One glance at the sunny haired Linda, however, proclaimed her of Aryan birth, as fair as any little Eva. "She's very pretty," she said politely. "She must have missed you during the war."

The lieutenant flushed. "I guess she did. Of course I didn't miss her in quite the same way, I was so busy and all, and you were certainly sweet to me, Tansy honey, when I was here. I'll never forget it. Never. But Linda Sue is from my home town, and I'm goin' to be livin' in Georgia, and somehow it just seemed natural that we should get together."

It was a moment or two before Tansy could speak then she said, "I thought you were going to try for a job in New York."

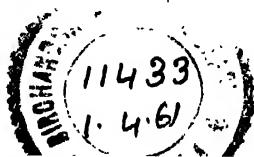
"Well I was, I have, but of course a lot of firms are obligated to take back the men they had who went to war and down home there's an office I can walk right into."

"Is it work you like?"

"Well it's a good opportunity. Linda Sue's father is an automobile dealer, he's an older man and he needs help. We feel that now with Detroit converting to civilian cars this is a good opportunity for me to get in on the ground floor." There must have been something in her expression that made him add, "I suppose that sounds calculating to you, honey, but it's just dumb luck and has nothin' to do with my affection for Linda Sue."

"I'm sure it hasn't," Tansy said gently. "You don't owe me any explanation, Andy. I take it you and she are going to be married?"

He nodded. "Since you've been such a good friend to me I knew you'd be glad I was happy and I wanted you to be the first to know."



"That's very sweet of you, Andy. Your welfare is important to me, you may be sure." If this was a barb it glanced off the lieutenant's firm bronzed young hide. Unscathed, he gave a happy sigh. "I've told Linda Sue about you—just that we were friends, I mean—and she's crazy to meet you some day."

"That would be lovely. You two must talk about me from time to time. Keep my memory green." Andy laughed appreciatively. "That's a good one. You're fast, sugar. Lordy, I'm goin' to miss watchin' you New York girls whizz by. You sure are fun for a holiday but I don't know as I could stand it for a steady diet." In the back of Tansy's mind she heard a faint ping, an echo of Nora's words . . . how good is he for the long haul? For the long haul with her, apparently, not very. She was shaken, but what could she do? Grin and bear it, I suppose, she thought, mustering the resignation one must perforce have when the road is closed.

After luncheon, when they parted company, she had been able to make her good wishes sound sincere and, as she reminded herself, why not? She and Andy had never had what might be called a serious understanding. They had had fun when he was on leave, their light venture had been a happy one, and his citation had invested him with a special aura in her eyes but it wasn't, she supposed, any more real love than the emotions a previous generation of girls had felt for the great hero of their day, Charles Lindbergh. In spite of this common-sense viewpoint, however, she felt let down. Would she have married Andy if he had asked her? Would she have given up her job and all her friends and gone to live in Thomasville, Georgia, if he hadn't landed something in New York?

It was unlikely, but she was a woman and she was twenty-five. An attractive eligible man had been removed from her orbit. Staring at herself in the mirror across the room she murmured firmly as her eyes brimmed with tears, I will not be a dog in the manger, I will not . . . but if only he were a little less appealing and not so brave!

When Cass Hanophy arrived in New York from Berlin he stayed in the city only briefly en route to Washington where, at the behest of his bosses in the World Press Service, he spent six weeks shuttling between the Pentagon and Capitol Hill, filing daily copy for readers supposedly avid for news of the military and of their duly elected representatives in Congress.

Only when he returned to New York did he begin to think seriously of Tansy. She brought back his Cleveland days and the job he had had on the Plain Dealer. Those distant days when they had been in love, when, without definition, they had expected to be married. Work and war dissipated their plans.

In 1739 Robert Hanophy died, leaving his son a small amount of life insurance. Cass, conscious of his lack of seniority on the paper but determined on his life's work, offered to pay his own fare and expenses if the Plain Dealer would accredit him to Germany as its correspondent to cover Hitler's mounting activities.

The editor fell in with this economically tempting proposal and even upped his salary when it became apparent that the paper had a distinctly bright button on its hands.

In 1741, when he returned to the United States, his fame had grown, and after Pearl Harbor he accepted an

offer from World Press Service, an organization with wider scope than the Plain Dealer and a more liberal outlook financially. A certain acerbity marred the farewells of reporter and employer but Cass, despite a genuine regret at leaving his old job, was consoled by the exhilarating and constantly changing pace of the new, and for the Dealer the serpent's tooth was blunted by its pride in the fact that it was a great training ground and that Cass Hanophy was only one of the top flight newspapermen who had their alma mater to thank for solid grounding in their craft.

The parting from the paper had been hard. The parting of the young lovers was wrenching pain for both of them. They would write, they would see each other as soon as Cass returned from Europe. When that would be, neither of them dared think. Tansy didn't reproach him for going. She was his girl, but she accepted the fact that his job came first. He would make a success, he would earn good money, they would be married. They were both sure of that, they both wanted it, yet gradually their tight little world became unravelled.

Instead of the lover and his lass who had parted on that sultry July day six years ago, they were now near strangers who remembered each other with affection, with uncertainty, with a subdued, drumming excitement.

Although Cass's personal reasons for getting in touch with Tansy were cogent, it was an assignment from W.P.S. that actually propelled him to the telephone.

W.P.S. wanted a series on outstanding American business men who, growing ever more powerful between the two World Wars, had come to full fig between 1939 and 1745. Joshua Buell Hutchinson led the category. So far Hutchinson himself had been unavailable but Cass

had carefully checked the skeleton of his career and had interviewed two Right Hands and one Bitter Enemy. What he needed was the human touch, Hutchinson the man. Tansy had known him since childhood, she was the person to go to. Cass dialled her office number. "May I speak to Miss Delafield, please? This is Mr. Cass Hanophy." He heard the secretary relay his name and then there was a sudden silence. A hand, he guessed rightly, had been clamped over the mouthpiece. Cass smiled to himself. His name had probably come as a surprise. In a moment he heard Tansy's soft deep voice, but the tone was tentative. "Hello?"

"Tansy?"

"Cass! Is that you?"

"None other. Your childhood chum back from the wars."

"Oh, Cass. Oh, my dear, how wonderful to hear your voice. How are you? Where are you?"

"Fine. About a mile away, right here at W.P.S. I could do with the sight of you."

"Me too. I'm longing to see you." She found she had to steady her arm on the desk, for suddenly she was trembling. "Where have you been? When did you get back to New York?"

"It's a long story. I'll tell you everything when I see you. I've been back from Europe several weeks, but in Washington. How are you?"

"Oh, I'm fine too." There was a pause. He was glad her health was good but the thing he most wanted to know he couldn't quite bring himself to ask. 'Are you married?' seemed a bit abrupt. From the little he had heard about Tansy since his return he gathered she wasn't, but it was

never safe to take such matters for granted. Six years. She would have had time to be married and to raise quite a family. How to be subtle yet direct? "Look, Tanse," he said, "I want terribly to see you for about a million reasons. When can you dine with me?"

"Oh, almost any time, but how about coming around for a drink first? This afternoon . . . oh, damn, no I can't." Lorraine was shaking her head and pointing to the desk calendar. "I'm tied up with a client. Is tomorrow all right?" Lorraine nodded.

"It's good for me," Cass said. "Is it this address? The one in the book?"

"That's right. How about six o'clock?"

"Perfect." Married or not married? Probably not. Free to dine 'any time' and nothing about 'You and Jack must meet each other'. "Tanse, listen, there's something I want to ask you."

"Yes?"

"Do you still know Joshua Buell Hutchinson?"

"Oh." She didn't know what exactly she had expected but it wasn't quite that. "Yes, yes, of course. I see him quite often. Why?"

"I've got to do a piece about him—a kind of a profile thing. I remembered you knew him as a kid. I thought maybe you'd be able to give me some pointers."

"I'll do whatever I can, certainly."

"Gosh, it'll be great to see you."

"It's been a long time, hasn't it?"

"A couple of thousand years too long. How's your mother?"

"Mother's well. She's living in Columbus now, you know. She moved there about three years ago."

"She's my girl. Give her my love when you write."

"I will. She'll be happy you're back, too." There was another pause while they reconstructed a past epoch of their lives.

"Well, so long," Cass said. "See you at six tomorrow." They hung up.

It was now five minutes before the hour. For the third time Tansy rearranged the flowers, changed the position of the ashtrays, and checked the ice cubes. Oneida, her part-time pearl, was in control of the hot *hors d'œuvres*.

Whereas her friend, Lieutenant Hollister, had been the essence of promptness when he came bearing his grim little tidings, it was nearly half an hour after the time appointed when Mr. Hanophy rang her bell.

In her excitement, between rushing to the front door or out the back, she compromised by retreating hastily to the bedroom. The apartment was not large. She heard Oneida's heavy tread as she went to the door, Cass's voice in greeting, and his inquiry, was Miss Delafield at home?

"Cass?" she called.

"Tansy? Where are you?"

"Coming." She gave a quick glance at the mirror. Hair, eyes, nose all seemed to be in place. She hurried to meet him hands outstretched. He grasped her hands tightly, dropped them, took her in his arms, and hugged her. They separated a little breathlessly. "Let me look at you." He stared until she dropped her eyes and then he laughed softly. "I don't have to ask how you are. Lord, oh Lord." The phrase was ambiguous but not his expression. His expression shouted, "You are beautiful." He had forgotten

the impact she was likely to make on a man. One got used to her of course but at first flush she could be startling. Those blue, blue eyes with the heavy lashes, the curling dark hair, her scarlet mouth, and the planes of her face. . . . There was some advantage, he reflected, in knowing about a girl's ancestry. She had her mother's bone structure—it would endure. She had something else too. Dressed in hip boots and a parka she would radiate more sex than half the women he knew clad in bikinis.

"Cass, Cass," she was saying, "it's been forever. You look wonderful. You know something? I think you've grown." And she laughed, the deep booming Buddha laugh. Cass joined in. "Thank God you haven't lost it," he said. "I was afraid you might have gone all sissified and refined but you're still my good old bass, my coarse aromatic weed."

She laughed again. "Oh, Cass, that terrible old joke. Stop it." He had always teased her about her name and the way she got it. When she was born her eyes were so big and so deep a blue that her parents had decided to name her Pansy but old Dr. Bradbury, who christened her, was very deaf and got it wrong. He sprinkled her with water and pronounced her Tansy, so, thinking it a pretty sound regardless of its meaning, her parents let the name stick.

"Anyway," Cass continued, "you cheer me. If I look taller it must mean I'm thinner."

"Nonsense. You were always thin. A well-built *thin* man." She had always found him attractive.

Tall, broad-shouldered and lean, the skin of his face stretched tightly across his cheek-bones and across the bridge of his nose. He had narrow, humorous eyes, and

having looked upon most of the world his eyelids, like those of the Mona Lisa, were a little weary.

Tansy inquired what he would drink and poured the mild whisky and water he asked for.

"Let's get Hutchinson out of the way first," he said, "then we can talk."

Tansy smiled. He hadn't changed, always the job came first. He was a quick, precise, thorough worker. She had admired Cass as much as she had loved him, and she was grateful they had Joshua to discuss as a starter. He was an impersonal topic and set the ball rolling, rubbing off any shyness they might have felt after so long a separation and such great changes in their lives.

"Knowing him all these years," Cass said, "you must have some angles on him."

"Oh, I have. It's just that I don't know if they'll be any good for your purpose. I imagine you want meaty stuff, not something for the woman's page. Although, judging from Josh's reputation and what he says himself, he's very candid about these matters, the woman's page is just where he belongs. Actually, it's that side of him I know better than the business things."

Cass's eyebrows rose. "Go on, Miss Delafield. Tell me of the concupiscent life of a young woman about town."

"Don't be silly. You know perfectly well what I mean. I just know him better as a person than that public figure people are always talking about. All I know about the tycoon part is what everybody knows; that he's got a gigantic fortune and is chairman of enough boards to build a house, and president of Lord knows how many companies.

"Nora Bailey, she's a darling and a great friend of mine, is his girl, at least the principal girl—and it's all right for me

to tell you that because she makes no secret of it herself—well, Nora once said something about a process he controls for breaking down carbon compounds which means he has a lot of power because of by-products and things, and then of course there's the uranium and, I believe, a couple of oil fields, but maybe that isn't what you mean."

"Go on," Cass said. "You're doing fine. The actual business dope I more or less know. I've talked to people in his organization—Jake Greenleaf, particularly." Tansy nodded. "It's the essence I'm after. Hutchinson, the man."

"Well, then there are the newspapers he owns," she continued.

"Seven, I believe."

"And three radio stations, and he's very bullish on this television business a lot of people are getting interested in."

"What's that guy want to do?" Cass asked curiously. "Control communications as well as the nation's resources?"

"I guess," Tansy said, "he wants to be able to mould opinion in case there are any complaints over the amount of natural resources he does control."

Cass looked at her with amusement. Apparently she had Hutchinson pretty shrewdly taped. "How does he transport all these raw materials?" he asked, half laughing. "Doesn't he own some railroads and shipping too?"

"Probably," Tansy agreed, "through all those myriad companies he's involved in. But why don't you ask him direct? He and Nora are dining with me Saturday. Why don't you come too?"

"Thanks," Cass said. "I'd like to." He grinned.

"What's funny?"

"I'm impressed," he said. He was, too. It was all very

well that she had known Hutchinson since childhood but that he was coming here to dine, just casually, *en famille*, in this small apartment . . . yet why not? It was natural enough, he supposed. Hutchinson liked women and where could he find a lovelier one?

Tansy for her part was pleased that Cass accepted her invitation. She was not, perhaps, in love with him all over again but she was liking him very, very much. Also, with Lieutenant Hollister missing from the roster she had been wondering whom she might invite to meet Josh, and here was a man of calibre.

"After dinner," Cass said, "how about coming out with me? All of you? I've got a table at The Birches. Harry Marble's appearing there and I haven't seen him since before the war. Funniest night club comic in the business. He did a wonderful job in the war. Went to some of the most god-forsaken islands in the Pacific to play for gun crews, and in Europe went right up to the front where the going was rough and entertained at every base hospital he could get to. The men were crazy about him."

"It's nice of you to ask us, Cass, but I doubt if Josh and Nora can go. She said something about their going on to play bridge with some people afterwards. I believe Josh plays with more enthusiasm than skill but every once in a while he's got to have a game."

"But *you'll* come?"

"If you want me to, of course."

Another pause, but this time Cass decided he could hold out no longer. "You've never married?"

She laughed. "There's no husband secreted on the premises if that's what you mean. This apartment would be a bit crowded for two."

"But have you *been* married?" She shook her head.
"No, sir. You behold in me an old maid."

"Somehow you don't look the part." There was a little silence while they sipped their drinks, then Tansy said, "You'll learn lots about Joshua when you see him, Cass. Let's talk about you. What have you been up to all these years?"

"War, mostly. I was in Europe for a couple of years . . ."

"I know. I still have your letters."

"Then after Pearl Harbor I did a stretch in the Pacific, then back to Europe for the duration where I battled heroically with typewriter and now and again a camera."

"Any fun at all?"

"I'll say. I was in all the hot spots at the right time."

"Oh, Cass, you might have been killed."

"They'd have had to catch me first, and I can outstrip an ostrich. Didn't you read any of my stuff, for God's sake?"

"Of course. I thought you did the best reporting of the war, but when I said fun I meant the civilian idea."

"Liquor and luscious bal: :?"

"Kind of."

"By the gross. We newspapermen live high. Real devil-may-care stuff. I was never without my trench-coat and snap brim hat. Glass in hand, arm around some dilly."

They laughed and talked of the war and what they might expect now it was over and Tansy asked about his family in Cleveland.

"Mother and my sister Betty are fine," he said. He hesitated and then plunged. "They're in seventh heaven now that little Cass is with them."

"Little Cass?"

"My kid."

She had just refilled their drinks. She set her glass down carefully on the table beside her. "How . . . how grand to have one. I didn't realize you were married." And, as he said nothing, "You are married, I take it?"

"Oh yes, yes, I'm married." Tansy's mouth felt dry. She picked up her glass and took a sip. "Well, don't just sit there. When did it happen? Who is she? Where is she?"

"It happened in 'forty-two. After I'd been in the Pacific for about seven months I got transferred to England." He stopped. He was thinking that among the major damn fools of history he ranked high. He had drifted away from the most beautiful woman he had ever known, he had found her again desirable and lovely, by a stroke of good luck she was still unmarried and he was hobbled hand and foot. After a prolonged pause he said abruptly, "My marriage is no damn' good, Tan. It wasn't from the start. I sound like a heel, I know, but Laurie and I just aren't right for each other. Still, we're in for it now and that's that."

"Nineteen forty-two was about when you stopped writing. I wondered why. I assumed it was the war."

"It was the war. Matter of fact Laurie and I never spent a great deal of time together."

Tansy smiled fleetingly, "But enough. Tell me about her. Did you meet in England?"

Cass nodded. "She's an American but she was in London working for the Red Cross. I don't want to put it down to war hysteria, that sounds weak, but just the same if there hadn't been a war I doubt if we'd have done it. We'd been together three or four months when Laurie found she was pregnant. We talked it over. She wanted to keep the baby and in a way I wanted her to. We decided to get

married. I think we both thought maybe a baby would fix things—already we were out of step—but naturally it didn't work. Our characters didn't change any more than the colour of our eyes. We were just as incompatible with a child as without. More so if anything, the poor kid was a bone of contention. The thing that kept us going really was the fact that I was away so much. We rented a little house in the country about thirty miles from London and Laurie mostly stayed there, waiting for the baby, and after it came.

"It wasn't much fun for her, I know that. Rationed food, not enough fuel, few friends. It was more rugged for her than for me. That's one reason I feel I ought to hang on. Now that the war's over maybe I can make it up to her a bit."

The other reason he thought he ought to hang on, although he tried not to contemplate it, was that Laurie had sworn she would never give him a divorce and she meant it.

"How old is little Cass?" Tansy asked.

"Bit over two."

"Does he look like you? Let me see his picture." She held out her hand and Cass felt a twinge of the old emotion. It was natural for fathers to carry their small sons' pictures with them and to need little persuasion to show them off, probably everybody did it but there was something in her sure gesture that touched a nerve of memory. It was the old easy familiarity with which she used to hold out her hand for his handkerchief without asking for it or for a cigarette or for pennies for children.

He took out his wallet and handed her a snapshot. Cass junior was leaning against a woman's knee but that was all

that was visible of her as the picture had been cut off just above the child's head. Tansy studied it a long time. "He's a lamb," she said at last, "he has your eyes. It must be hard for you not to see him."

"I can see him any time I go home of course, but I don't get much chance. I'm afraid too, I don't make many chances. Through the wire service I was able to pull a few strings and I got them over here almost immediately the war was over. They went straight to Cleveland and have been with the family ever since. I send money but Mother and Betty are only too happy to have them. For the time being Laurie seems quite content."

"It sounds very domestic." Tansy laughed but this time the big boom was a little plink without merriment. "I feel old," she said.

"Good God, why? You're beautiful, you're lovelier than I've ever seen you."

"Thank you, but women feel old when all the men they know are getting married. I seem to hear that chariot, the winged one, whooshing by. I think I'll have to be getting married myself."

"I was afraid you might be," he said.

"Afraid? Why, for heaven's sake? What possible difference could it make to you?"

"If you weren't happy it would make a great deal of difference to me."

"Because we were childhood sweethearts?"

"As I recall those emotions they weren't very child-like."

"That's how I recall them too," she said gently. "We must be mistaken. They weren't durable."

There was a silence between them. After a bit he stood

up. "Look here, there's not going to be any trouble about my seeing you, is there? I mean, that's crazy, we're too good friends for that." Friendship, the rake's time-honoured refuge, she thought, and knew she was wrong. Cass was no rake. Probably very few men married the first girls they fell in love with. That didn't make them scoundrels. It was just . . . well, Cass meant her late teens and home. He was part of her life, of her thought. When she had learned he was back the world seemed once more on an even keel and concern over Lieutenant Hollister vanished like morning mist. The old tenderness and desire for her first love came flooding back. It was a bad shock to find him married but she didn't have the strength to say she wouldn't see him. Besides, that seemed silly. You didn't not speak to a man just because he was married.

Finally she said, "I hope to see you, of course, but I expect you'll be pretty busy. You'll have a lot of catching up to do."

"I'd like to do a little with you, if you'll let me. My spies report that your business is going great guns, I want to hear about it. I want to meet your friends. What the hell, this is your home town, show a little hospitality. Pity melancholy me."

In spite of herself Tansy laughed. "Sitting alone night after night in your hotel room, I don't doubt."

"No. As a matter of fact through dishonest means and sheer animal magnetism I've snagged an apartment. The roué's special. One room, a minute john and a shelf with electric plugs, the kitchen." He ogled her. "Come up and try my beef stroganoff some time."

"Listen," Tansy said seriously, "you were lucky to get that."

"Don't I know it. Most of the people who've come back have to go through the routine of moving to a new hotel every five nights."

Again there was a little pause. Suddenly he smiled. "What time is it?"

Tansy glanced at the watch on her left wrist. "Twenty off eight." She kept on looking at the watch, fingering it. "After all these years you're still wearing it," he said.

She flashed him a glance from under her long lashes. "For a very practical reason. It keeps good time."

"I'm glad. It's a little as though I were keeping tabs on you." The watch had been his present on her nineteenth birthday. It was a pretty old one, gold with a gold flexible strap. He had been able to afford it because that was about the time his father died and Cass dipped into the small amount of life insurance to pay for it. His eyes twinkled. "I trust you won't feel called upon to relinquish it now that I'm a married man."

"That would be foolish," she said coolly. "I like it very much."

"Tansy, you're not mad at me?"

"Whatever for?"

"Well . . . I mean . . . I got married."

She started to laugh. The laugh grew a little hysterical. Men were wonderful. They never ceased to tell you how beautiful you were, how kind and dear, and then off they went to the wars and came back with the heartwarming news that they were married or were about to be married to somebody else and they knew you'd understand and please don't be mad.

"Look," he said, "how about having dinner with me?"

I've got to go back to the office for a while but I'll pick you up at eight-thirty. Okay?"

She shook her head. "I'm sorry. I have a dinner engagement." And as he looked sceptical, "I have, truly, and I'm going to be good and late. It's with some of those friends you mentioned. I've had it for a week but I'll see you Saturday. You'll come?"

Cass moved his hands in a little gesture of defeat. "I'll come." After he left Tansy started slowly to dress for the dinner party. Now what, she thought, now what? Will I keep on seeing him? Will I fall in love with him all over again? The emotions she had felt in talking to him convinced her this would not be difficult. But if he didn't marry me when we were both free, she thought, what chance would I have now that he's married to someone else? She sighed. His manner had been affectionate, his eyes had been amused and tender, a nice beginning but still a long way from a wedding ring. Other men looked at her that way too, but how long did it go on? She dabbed perfume behind her ears and gazed at herself in the mirror. I'm nearer twenty-six than twenty-five and time goes by so quickly. I think about how I should like to be married, I should like it very much. Oh, well, who knows? And off she went to the dinner party with the unspoken prayer of every unmarried woman, maybe tonight I will meet The Man.

Two

TANSY'S Saturday night dinner party was going very well. Cass and Nora had clicked immediately. She was attractively if commercially blonde with candid eyes and a friendly, easy-going manner that he found pleasant. His reaction to Joshua was more mixed, which made it mutual. When, prior to his arrival, Tansy had said Cass was coming and explained who he was, Joshua had observed testily, "Why in God's name do you have to have the Press?" "He's Tansy's *friend*," Nora had explained. There were moments when she wondered how Joshua had ever got where he was. In some respects he was positively childlike. "He's her friend and she's in the publicity business. Why wouldn't she have him?"

"Publicity!" Joshua spat the word. "That's the trouble with this country, too damn' much publicity. A man's affairs are no longer his own. You dames haven't the wit to realize it, but anybody in business today gets this great, gorgeous, blazing publicity you're all so crazy about centred on him and he can't do his job. It's interviews here and explanations there, and the next thing you know you end up with a Senate investigation and then, God help you! Hog-tied and whipsawed."

The two women looked at each other. "I don't think you need worry about Cass," Tansy said mildly. "He's an old friend, and this evening is merely sociable. Believe me, I understand your feeling about publicity, Josh. You'd never get it from me; you know that."

"I'd better not, Chick. Although I will say for you, considering the crazy job you're in you've got an unexpected amount of common sense."

When the two men were introduced, Joshua had said to Cass, "Tansy tells me you're here in a civilian capacity. I trust she knows what she's talking about. No interviews, mind you."

By brisk, mental legerdemain Cass was able to transmute what actually he had been thinking of as an interview into more dinner-table conversation. He could thus reassure Joshua without too great a strain on his conscience. Now they had finished the meal and the ladies had left the room. Cass accepted one of the Hutchinson cigars. It was so mellow he suspected it was made of old twenty-dollar bills. As he lighted it he studied his companion. After his first blast about no interviews, Joshua had been relaxed and outspoken in his conversation, but he had not referred to Cass's meetings with his business associates, and Cass was puzzled. It was unlikely that he didn't know of them. Perhaps the moment had come to take his bull by the horns. "I imagine," he said, "that Jake Greenleaf must have told you that I've talked to him about you and Federal Coal and Uranium."

Joshua looked at him with a slight twinkle. "Offence is the best defence, ugh?" Since that is what had been in Cass's mind he felt the need of denial. "Not at all, but he was most co-operative, and I'm grateful."

"He's a good man," Joshua conceded. "Tell you more about the details than I can." This kind of discussion caused him no concern. It was routine and very much the kind of thing you would pick up in the company's brochures. It was curiosity about his plans, a probing of his lesser-known

schemes that irritated him. That and the current mania for "colour," whatever that was. Joshua was aware there were those who would consider deadly nightshade his most fitting hue, and he wanted no part of it. Colour, however, was apparently what was on the newspaperman's mind, for Cass was saying, "I understand how you feel about personal publicity, Mr. Hutchinson, but with your achievements and interests you can scarcely avoid it."

"I can avoid it in my own newspapers," Josh said drily. "That's one release from W.P.S. I promise you we won't be printing."

Cass smiled. "But thousands will. I can dig up a lot, Mr. Hutchinson, but it would be nice of you to make my job easier. I'd simply like to get a few of your own views directly from you. Quite possibly they'd nullify some of the unflattering opinions people have formed from hearsay. I'm after the truth. This isn't sensationalism, you know."

"No," Joshua said; "it's blackmail." And then, with a disconcertingly swift change of mood, he added amiably, "Okay. Shoot." Something had occurred to him. This young man might be useful. Tansy said he had just spent six weeks in Washington talking to a lot of politicians. Perhaps he had sensed which way the wind was blowing. Joshua was about to speak when Cass posed his first question. "Excluding Government and politics *per se* and the prestige of such military leaders as Eisenhower and MacArthur, who would you say was the most powerful person in the United States today?"

Joshua smelled a rat. "I don't think you can reduce it to persons," he said blandly. "It's elements. Communications, for instance. A dominant force. The Press, radio, advertising . . . the scope's enormous, but it's no one man."

"What about transportation?"

"What about it? In a sense, it's a form of communication too. Perhaps the most cogent. Take people from one spot to another—they damn' well communicate."

"If we continue to go along with your elements as opposed to individuals," Cass said, "how would you scale the control of national resources?"

Joshua looked at him sharply. "The question's unsound. National resources *are* the country."

"And you don't think one individual could have the power to dominate them, or such a percentage of them, that he could to some extent exercise a dictatorship?"

"It's never happened."

"What about John D. Rockefeller?"

Joshua laughed. "Is this to be a dissertation on the venality of big business, Mr. Hanophy? I'm a very humble operator compared to Rockefeller and even his control was by no means absolute."

"But you'll admit at the height of his activity when he held oil and the railroads in his hand he was making a pretty good stab at it?"

"Times," said Joshua, and his expression was almost wistful, "times have changed."

They had indeed. Mr. Hutchinson sometimes felt he had been born at twilight. He would groan when he thought of the giants of the nineteenth century: Vanderbilt, Fisk, Carnegie, Insull, Rockefeller . . . By God they were free men breathing free air. Of course, there were vast fortunes today, his own among them, but what could a man *keep*?

The shadows of Government and the labour unions stretched ever longer across an individual's initiative. In a

so-called free land this was wrong. Joshua, however, was philosophical. The Government and the unions were now entrenched as once big business had been. They, in fact, were big business. Very well. If you couldn't like restrictions in a head-on collision, circumvent them. In the back of his mind an idea was stirring. It was at the moment embryonic but the growth potential was exhilarating.

For a man in his position the attitude of the Secretary of the Interior was important and Joshua could only feel that that of Lawrence MacNamara, the present incumbent, was unfortunate. Lawrence, he sensed, was not his fan.

He had put out all kinds of friendly feelers, but MacNamara's attitude was antipathetic. Some of Hutchinson's dealings the Secretary knew about and didn't like but they were, strictly speaking, legal. Other activities he felt to be suspect, but he was without proof. What you might think about a man and what you could prove in court were very different. The one thing he was sure of, however, was that Hutchinson was in the market for a glorified stooge to do his bidding and that was a role for which he had no stomach. Also, the reason for the implied deal puzzled him. If everything was as straightforward as Hutchinson professed, why was Hutchinson courting him so assiduously? Scarcely, he fancied, for his *joie de vivre* and smiling Irish eyes. Unless, possibly, to keep them closed.

Both remembered meetings where, with the self-control and gingerly skill of men in a bomb-disposal squad, they had sounded each other out. How far did one want to go? How much would the other condone? The negotiations, if that was not too concrete a term for the tentative probing, the nebulous queries that characterized their exchange, had died aborning. MacNamara was not overly perceptive but

he had a hard core of honesty. There was a chasm between where Mr. Hutchinson wanted to go and where he got. He was irked by the disparity to a greater degree than MacNamara was aware, since he had no real conception of the scope of Hutchinson's desires. Even so, the encounters had been memorable, and after one of them, over a drink, sitting quietly in a small library in Washington, MacNamara had told a charming woman about it and had ended by saying that for once he thought the old fox had been out-smarted. "He was much too shrewd to let me glimpse anything irregular," MacNamara said. "I had to depend on my nose, but I think, for a while anyway, he'll toe the straight and narrow. At least as far as his business enterprises are concerned. From what I hear of his private morals," he added with a laugh, "they resemble a maze. I doubt that he himself could find his way through them without a thread and breadcrumbs." Sheila Parsons, the charming lady in the small library, came over and kissed him. "Shss . . . let us risk no stones in our ultra modern, oh so vulnerable glass house, shall we?"

MacNamara drew her down on his lap. "Sweetheart, don't be afraid. Nobody will ever know until the moment when we can speak out freely. This isn't the way either of us wants it, but we've only a little while longer to go."

"Not so little. Until nineteen forty-eight, anyway, and sometimes I get frightened. If only I didn't love you so much. You know Ben, you know how possessive and jealous he is in spite of the difference in our ages."

"Because of the difference in our ages, my lamb. You're daughter as well as wife to him."

She smiled ruefully. "In or out of office that isn't going to change."

"No," he said, "and my poor lost Mary with her drugs, that isn't going to change either. It's bound to be a scandal and a mess but at least the sacred Administration won't be involved. Once we're out of Washington we'll be acting as private citizens and nobody will suffer from the mess but us. And, my darling lamb, bad as it's going to be I'd go through double for the sake of our being married and happy." They kissed, a long, searching kiss.

In the small walled garden beyond the uncurtained French windows a shadowy figure moved for a moment out of the deeper shadows of the shrubbery. In his hands the man held a camera with a telescopic lens. There was a little click and he was again swallowed up by the darkness.

Joshua Buell Hutchinson was nowhere about but he was one of the few people in the country who knew that the Secretary of the Interior was the lover of the wife of Benjamin Parsons, the Secretary of State. Such crumbs of information nourished him.

In his mind, now, the gentle mulling process of how to use the knowledge to his best advantage was going on. He would, he thought, be patient. MacNamara should have one more chance. Then, if he proved uncoöperative, steps might have to be taken. They might have been taken by now had Joshua had anyone to substitute in his place. So far, however, the best candidate he had been able to come up with was Harlow Runciman, the New York Senator. Runciman had been in his pocket for some time but for the job Hutchinson had in mind he was a mere fingerling. He knew quite well if he went to Ralph Swazey, the chairman of the Party, and urged him to put the heat on the President to exchange MacNamara for Runciman, much as Swazey was indebted to him, he'd laugh in his face. Hutchinson

couldn't blame him, good old Harlow was not Cabinet calibre.

His questioning of Cass, while it sounded idle enough, was motivated by the hope that he might mention someone Josh had not thought of who would be a possibility for the post. Cass had met several senators and congressmen and talked to many men in the Pentagon, but from Joshua's point of view he came up with no nuggets. Finally Joshua asked him if he had happened to meet the Secretary of the Interior.

"Yes," Cass said, "matter of fact I saw him two or three times. I knew him pretty well before the war. He's a good man."

Mr. Hutchinson's eyebrows rose in interest. "Do you consider he's doing a good job?"

"I do indeed. You don't agree?"

"Well, I've met him a few times myself. There's something about him . . . I doubt if he's altogether on the up and up."

Cass laughed outright. "MacNamara? My God, he's as open as his Irish face. If anything, I'd say that was his trouble. Sometimes in politics you have to dissemble a bit. He doesn't know how."

Joshua smiled and took a sip from his highball. "That's not the story according to Washington scuttle-butt. They do say he's doing a masterly job of dissembling with a lady, one of his colleague's wives. Not that that's anything against his professional ability even if true. I've always thought the European attitude much more realistic than ours about that sort of thing, but here you can't get away with it."

"I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about." Cass's tone was abrupt. He liked and respected MacNamara

and the fact that Hutchinson had heard rumours of an affair disturbed him. Cass himself had heard vague gossip while in Washington but he chose to ignore it. Still, if it were true, knowledge of it in the wrong quarters could cause trouble. Not wanting the idea to root in Hutchinson's mind he changed the subject.

"Tansy and I are going to The Birches, Mr. Hutchinson. Why don't you and Miss Bailey come along? Harry Marble's a great fellow, you probably know him."

"He's good," Josh agreed, "but I'm afraid not tonight. Nora and I have a bridge date. Hey, Nora," he shouted, rising and walking towards the door, "what the hell's the matter? You girls fallen through?"

The ladies, it was true, had been taking some little time to powder their noses. They had been discussing men. Specifically Mr. Cass Hanophy and the wedded bliss of Joshua Buell Hutchinson. Nora, stubbornly set on a romantic alliance between Tansy and Cass, was convinced that, given the opportunity of seeing enough of her, Cass would want to divorce Laurie and marry his Cleveland sweetheart. "And don't tell me about his sense of duty to his wife. I'm not for breaking up anything solid but these war-time marriages, what are they? Propinquity. 'Let us live, love, and laugh, for tomorrow we die.' The lost generation wallowing in self-pity. Now you take Mr. and Mrs. Joshua Buell Hutchinson," Nora continued, her voice delicately distilled from vitriol, "that's a very different set-up. Two children, years of devotion, sharing every experience, every hope, struggling on together. No wonder Josh can't bring himself to turn her from his door."

"How long is it since he's seen her?" Tansy asked curiously. She knew, of course, that he was married,

Joshua indeed flaunted the fact. He would scarcely have recognized the wife he maintained in Paris in the greatest luxury, but she was unassailable girl insurance and he took care that all his conquests knew about her at once so that he was in no danger of being jockeyed into corners resembling matrimony.

"Eleven years since he's clapped an eye on her," Nora said, "eleven years at least."

"But that's absurd." Tansy was indignant. "He surely can't go on that way forever. He's bound to get a divorce one day."

Nora shook her head. "I used to think so, too. Anyway, I used to *wish* so. Now I know better. As long as she keeps the ocean between them Josh will cherish her. If he were to marry any of the local talent, me, for instance, we'd be around. He'd find it very irksome."

"But what about *her*? What's her name . . . Dolly? Don't you suppose she's going to get fed up?"

"With what? She's got her income and his name. The children are grown up but she has them and grandchildren to boot. Why should she care if she never sees Joshua again as long as she lives? Or if he has twenty mistresses and sets them all up like Du Barry? Lord knows he doesn't interfere with her. She's had that phoney Count lover for years and is happy as a lark."

Tansy sighed. "There you are. The situations aren't comparable, of course, but marriage can be quite a strong institution. Maybe Cass will hang on to his wife so he can play around too."

"Don't you dare," Nora said with spirit. "I've only met him tonight but I like that fellow. He actually got the tycoon into quite a cheery mood during dinner. Either it

was his charm or Papa's mulling some new deal that will net him another million."

Tansy laughed. "You always suspect Josh. Do you think he's plotting to corner Amalgamated Sea and Air?"

"It wouldn't surprise me. When he gets that benign manner it's usually the forerunner of something very large he's about to embrace, or else something very small. Small, young and cuddlesome. God, I hope it is merely air and water he wants." Nora made a grimace but her eyes were sad.

She ~~was seated~~ at the dressing table and Tansy leaned over her, her cheek against the blonde head. "Darling, I wish you didn't care."

Nora gave a little shrug. "I wish I didn't too, but the ironic thing is, it's no good if you don't. If you don't, you haven't anything. And after all there are moments."

It was at this point that Mr. Hutchinson's lyric mating call assailed their ears. "Listen to John Keats," Nora said. "Have we fallen through! No wonder Dolly went for that foreign Count."

"Oh, I don't know. Joshua's kind of honest."

"Well, he's honestly ruthless, if that's what you mean. You always know where he stands, if not where you do. Coming, dear," she called and, as they came out into the living room, "You know the Conrads never get to the bridge table, and they never get away from it. I bet you five bucks when we breeze in they'll look surprised and say, 'What, so soon?'"

"That may be, but it's nearly eleven. I want to get out of there by one. Come on."

Nora was slipping into her minks. "Okay, okay, but tomorrow's Sunday. We've got all day." She smiled

charmingly. She was anticipating the highly agreeable way in which Joshua was, on occasion, wont to spend his leisure. He brought to bear on lovemaking the same sustained concentration he applied to business. Unfortunately for Nora's dream of bliss business was in the ascendancy. "I know it's Sunday," Joshua said, "and from the Conrads you're going home. Jake Greenleaf and some of the boys are coming to the house at ten a.m. tomorrow and I'm tied up for the day."

"Oh." Unreasonably Nora's heart sank. She had had him for three evenings, what more could she expect? Nothing, but she hoped.

It might be two or three days or a week before she heard from him again and then he might walk in unannounced or his secretary would be on the phone telling her Mr. Hutchinson was expecting her for dinner. When she got to the house there might be the two of them dining and going to the play, there might be a dinner party of twenty, or there might be Cole the butler saying Mr. Hutchinson was detained but would Miss Bailey please wait. In the last year she had developed a duodenal ulcer. It was scarcely surprising.

To distract her, for she suddenly looked strangely lost, Cass urged once again that they join him and Tansy at The Birches.

"Can't," Joshua said, "but my car's downstairs. Come along and you can drop us off and Max'll take you on to the club."

The Birches was in the Forties west of Broadway, one of the drab exteriors harbouring that curious growth of shoddiness, talent, liquor and opulence that is New York's night life. Scrofulous and nondescript on the outside, inside

you went down a flight of stairs and found yourself in a reasonably fairy-like setting; white and green and glinting silver. The walls and ceiling were of sky blue leather, benches and chairs were green upholstered, and the small dance floor was surrounded by slender white tree trunks topped by fluttering leaves. Everyone said it was lovely, just like a birch grove.

Cass's table was against the wall on a small raised platform and the view of the dance floor where Harry Marble would presently be performing was unimpeded. He and Tansy ordered drinks and settled down to wait for the floor show and observe the Saturday night throng. The place was packed. Many of the women were in evening dress and half the men were in uniform. The band was resting, and Harry Marble sat at the piano strumming softly and humming to himself. No one paid any attention to him. When the chorus kids appeared the band would take over and he would start his act. The management thought he should make an entrance but Harry liked to play. "The lights in this joint, they don't know who the zombie at the piano is anyway. Turn on the spots, I shine like those road markers when head lights hit them."

At a table near to the one at which Tansy and Cass were sitting a drunk raised his voice in song but he was reasonably well under the control of his betters and the noise rising with the cigarette smoke was mostly an amiable hubbub, underscored by the piano and the clink of ice in the glasses.

They sat quietly not looking at each other but intensely aware of each other, feeling in that crowded room curiously remote and peaceful. From time to time they spoke in desultory fashion about friends in Cleveland or Cass would tell her an amusing or dramatic story of the war. He glanced

at his watch and observed that the floor show would go on in about ten minutes. He was looking around for a waiter to refill their glasses when he happened to notice that the drunk who had been singing had paused in mid-canticle and, ignoring his companions' protests, was climbing shakily on to the seat of his chair. Electric bulbs were hidden in the foliage of the birch trees. They were not very strong but one of them shone down directly on the drunk's table and apparently disturbed him. 'Don't Sit Under The Apple Tree' was his speciality and required mood lighting. He unscrewed the bulb and with a grunt of satisfaction stepped down and deposited his posterior gingerly upon his chair. He then smiled benignly flushed with success and resumed his song.

Unfortunately one of the ladies at his table intent upon a facial repair job took exception to the laboriously created gloom. "For God's sake, Fred," she said irritably, "we're twenty fathoms down as it is. What did you have to go and do that for? Waiter. Waiter!" Her shrill tone brought a captain to their table.

Cass and Tansy couldn't hear what was being said but the captain disappeared and in a few minutes a bus boy came up with some kitchen steps. He opened and mounted them and started to feel around under the fabric and paper leaves for the loosened bulb. Unable to find it in the darkness he lighted a match. Tansy and Cass watching him saw the match suddenly flare. Little bright beads rimmed a leaf for a moment and then burst into flame. It was a small flame but it licked at the surrounding leaves. They smouldered and caught slowly—they had been partially fireproofed—but the job was old. The bus boy on the steps at first attempted to pat out the flames with his hands. He had

almost succeeded when smoke began curling up among the leaves.

Cass glanced swiftly around. So far no one else seemed to have noticed what was happening but it could only be a matter of moments and he didn't care for the potential. "Come," he said to Tansy quietly, half-raising her to her feet. "We're getting out of here. Take it easy. Don't cross the dance floor, make our way along these tables, out there to the kitchen."

They had moved perhaps eight or ten feet when the boy on the steps trying to reach further into the foliage for a flickering leaf, lost his balance. He toppled over the table, crashing among the glasses. The woman who had been making up her face gave a little shriek. She glanced up and saw the smoke and the small swiftly licking flame. She stared at it for a moment, then she screamed, "Fire, my God, fire."

"Christ," muttered Cass, "that's torn it." Someone shouted, "Take it easy," but there were cries and screams and suddenly the entire packed night club was on its feet. Through the shrieks, grunts and swearing you could hear the crash of Harry Marble's piano as he tried to drown the uproar. "It's all right folks," he shouted, "nothing to get panicky about. Plenty of exits, everything's fireproofed. Come on, sing with me. Come on, sing." He swung into 'Oh What A Beautiful Morning'. It was useless. Spurred by terror the customers started a stampede for the one exit most of them knew, the one they had come in by. Unfortunately, the room was below street level. The stairs up were fairly steep and at the top, revolving doors led from the small lobby to the street. As people surged towards the staircase, an exposed wire short-circuited and the lights

went out. Simultaneously, although they did not burst into open flame, smoke started pouring from the leather covered walls and ceiling. Fumes from the old fire-proofing job were suffocating. Shrieking people clawed and trampled one another in the dark in their frantic efforts to reach the stairs. In shattering discord the piano ceased as Harry Marble was swept from his stool and trampled to death beneath the feet of the panic-stricken crowd. At the top of the staircase, pressed by those behind them, people got wedged into the revolving doors. It was impossible for the doors to turn and they were crushed to death, visible to those on the outside who could not get to them.

Downstairs, Cass and Tansy found themselves for one horrifying moment pinned against the wall, incapable of movement, and then in a mass convulsion of the crowd they were suddenly hurled through a swinging door into the kitchen. They landed on their knees, bruised, their clothing torn, but comparatively safe. Cass pulled Tansy to her feet, "Come on, there's got to be a way out of here, a delivery entrance, something." Pots were simmering on the stove and the gas was still on but the cooks and waiters had fled. Even in the pandemonium, however, Cass remembered that none of them had passed them in the night club proper, there had to be another exit. Rounding the corner of a big stove they saw it, a narrow winding passage. A staircase, they assumed, must lead up to the street and indeed at that moment charging towards them came two firemen with axes. Two others followed manipulating a long hose.

Gasping from the smoke and excitement, Cass gave Tansy a shove: "Go on, you'll be all right. If I can distract any of that mob from panic I'll try to pull some of them through the door we got through." But Tansy clung to

him. "No, Cass no, I beg you. You'll be killed, come on. You can't breathe in there."

"She's right, Mac, scram." One of the firemen jostled him aside as he ran. "How the hell did it happen?" Without waiting for an answer, he pushed on and started hacking at the swinging door. Cass shouted after him, "Your flash-lights, where are your lights, it's pitch black inside."

Flattening themselves against the wall to keep out of the firemen's way they eventually made the street. There it was nearly as bad. The mobs of curious, the sirens, the clanging of the fire-engines, the moaning hysterical people who had managed to escape created a churning hell.

Outside a dressing room window through which they had clambered, some twelve or fourteen feet above the throng in the street, chorus girls and boys in vivid pink and green costumes crowded to the edge of a fire escape. Driven by fear and lapping flames—the rickety wooden window frames were ablaze, encouraged by shouts from below, they leapt into the outstretched nets held by the police and firemen. One of the girls missed and crashed to the pavement.

Tansy and Cass were forced to the inner rim of the crowd where they stood trapped, obliged to watch the nightmare horror. As firemen broke the glass of the revolving doors and started to demolish the front of the building, the smell of burning flesh seeped into the street.

Suddenly, above the general bedlam, came a frenzied scream. "My husband, my husband, he's a cripple, he'll be burned to death." A woman, her clothes half torn from her body clawed her way through the crowd. A fireman was trying to quiet her, an ambulance attendant was pushing his way to her when a tall, striking man in a naval uniform

appeared beside her. "Where were you sitting?" he asked. "Towards the back," she gasped, "towards the back. A table farthest from the staircase."

"There may still be a chance," the man said and before the unbelieving eyes of those who saw him, shaking off the hands that would restrain him, he plunged back into the building. No one afterwards, including himself, could ever say how long it had taken him but he performed the impossible. He got down into the night club and back again fighting his way through the injured, the screaming and the dying and bearing in his arms a frail man whose twisted legs testified to what his fate would have been had he not been rescued. The cripple's face was ashen, he was half drugged with smoke but he was alive. In some miraculous fashion the frenzied crowd had by-passed his table.

Dirty, white, tense from strain, Tansy watched the naval officer return with his pitiable burden. Her eyes were enormous. "I have never seen such courage," she said over and over again. "I have never seen such courage. Oh Cass, who is he? What a man, what a fantastic human being." Deep inside him Cass felt a small chill. She seemed transfixed, bewitched by the act of heroism. "I don't know," he said shortly, "but I'll find out. First I have to get the office on the phone, come on. Can you make it?"

"Yes, yes, I'll be all right, don't worry about me. You must phone of course." Firemen had relieved the officer of his burden and tall as he was the shifting crowd obscured him from view. Policemen and an ambulance driver helped Tansy and Cass to inch their way through the mob. Tansy was so pale and was trembling so much that Cass was alarmed.

"Do you want to go to a hospital?" he asked. "Better

not if she's not hurt bad," the driver said. "Polyclinic and Roosevelt's jammed already. I never seen anything like this. Jeez, never. They got hacks and trucks and buses trying to get the bodies away."

Shaken and dishevelled though they were it was impossible to find a taxi. They walked three blocks through the bitter November night before they could get into a bar. Cass ordered two double brandies. "Here," he said to Tansy, "drink yours while I talk to the office." He went to the phone booth and returned in about ten minutes. "They've got two men down there covering it but I was able to give them a little dope on the start. If we can get a cab I'll take you home and then I've got to head back." She shuddered, "Oh, Cass no, not back into that hell, I won't have it."

"There's no danger now, dear, the firemen and cops are in control even if the fire isn't out." Tansy took a last swallow of her brandy. "Well, if you feel you must because of your job——"

"I do."

For a moment she sat as though numbed—bemused. Then she said, "I wonder who that man was. Did you ever see such courage in your whole life? Did you ever see . . .?" The shock, the need to escape from the appalling experience they had just undergone proved too much. Her voice trailed off, her head dropped back against the banquette, she was asleep.

The next morning Cass went around to her apartment to see how she was. He himself was exhausted having been up most of the night writing a report for W.P.S. Though pale and still a bit shaky the deep sleep Tansy

had fallen into had done a good deal to restore her. Cass sat beside her and shared her coffee. He glanced at the paper spread out on the bed.

"It was a holocaust, all right," he said. "Three hundred died in the club. There's damn' near two hundred more in hospitals. It looks as though an awful lot of them are going to die too."

"Oh, Cass, how frightful. It was panic mostly, wasn't it?"

"That and the fumes. I went inside. There was a couple sitting upright at their table. They hadn't panicked but they'd been asphyxiated. The bitter thing is that if people had stayed put there'd have been very few deaths. Maybe none. The smoke was frightful but doors would have been opened. Comparatively few were burned, and it was a short circuit that started the fire in the dressing rooms."

"The girl who jumped, she was killed, I guess?"

Cass nodded. "And Harry Marble, trampled to death. Poor sweet brave little guy. Took a hundred chances in the war and came home to this."

They stared dully at the headlines. Tansy put her hand on his. "I owe you my life, Cass, I know that. If you hadn't started us out when you did we wouldn't have had a chance."

"No, oddly enough, we mightn't have been so badly off. That cripple fellow wasn't too far from where we were. The crowd moved in the other direction."

"Oh. Did you find out . . .?"

"Yes. Yes I did," he said. "I was a fool not to have recognized him. Your hero is Langdon Bishop."

"Bishop? Who's he?"

"Quite a lad. He enlisted in the Navy in 'forty-two, at

the expiration of his first term in the Senate. Before that he was something of a boy wonder in politics. Youngest Attorney-General in his State."

"Goodness," Tansy said. "Bright as well as brave."

"And beautiful."

"Well, he was impressive, don't you think? Very tall, certainly."

"Six feet three or four, anyway."

"Gosh, think how proud his wife must be!"

Cass looked at her quizzically. "You can stop fishing. The gentleman is a bachelor." To her annoyance Tansy felt herself blushing. "Pleased?" he asked.

"Oh, Cass, how absurd. A total stranger, whom I'll never meet."

"Why not? It's a small world."

"Not that small."

"Do you want to meet him?"

"Well, sure, I suppose so. Don't you? That kind of courage—you don't see it every day."

It was unreasonable, he knew, but Cass felt a strong disinclination to bring them together. Not that he had any rights in the matter, he acknowledged that, even so he wasn't obligated to arrange an appointment. He wasn't but he felt a little snide. He had been assigned to do an interview with Bishop that afternoon. Why not tell her? She would be interested. Disclosure was on the tip of his tongue but he decided to wait and see what kind of a man he had to deal with.

He stood up. "I've got to get cracking. They want the dope from the hospitals and as many interviews as we can get."

"Will you call me later?"

"You bet." He bent and kissed the top of her head, then he left her.

Tansy sank back on her pillows, closed her eyes and fell asleep to dream of the Commander running down a corridor and gathering her in his arms just as roaring flames were closing in about her.

The morning papers had carried the first fragmentary reports of The Birches fire. In the afternoon Press a shocked nation read the names of the dead and of those who had survived. Tansy was mentioned as having been there, and from the time the papers appeared on the street her phone started ringing.

About six, Joshua appeared in her apartment. Joshua was tough on women who loved him but his friends often found him unexpectedly solicitous. This was due, not so much to kindness, as to an insatiable curiosity. He was as bad as an old woman when it came to poking his nose into other people's business.

"What the hell goes on?" he demanded as soon as he was through the door. "Your line's been busy all day."

"I know. It was genuinely busy till I thought I'd go crazy and for the past two hours I've had the phone off the hook."

"Well, are you all right? Are you hurt at all? Do you want me to get hold of my doctor? You ought to be treated for shock."

"Thanks, Josh, but I'm all right, I promise. It was rugged but we got out with nothing worse than our clothes in shreds. Cass Hanophy was absolutely marvellous. Don't ever again say anything against a newspaperman."

"Did you see that guy Bishop? Is what they say about him true?"

"If you mean did he go back and rescue the lame man, yes, he did."

Joshua, who had been rushing along at a great pace, slowed. "Mumm," he said thoughtfully, and after a slight pause, "Uh huh." Tansy sat quietly, waiting for him to elucidate. "Did you get to meet him?" he asked suddenly.

"No I didn't. It wasn't a cocktail party, you know. You can't think what the crush and confusion and noise in the street was like. Actually we were quite near him and then all at once he vanished."

"I've heard of him," Joshua said. "He was making quite a name for himself in politics when the war broke out. He's obviously got guts. Sounds interesting."

"He must be extraordinary and he's magnificent looking. And such courage! I still can't believe what he did and I saw it with my own eyes. I wonder is he here on leave? Does he live in New York or what?"

Joshua looked at her more closely. "He seems to have made quite an impression on you."

"You'd have been impressed too, if you'd been there."

"Want to meet him?" It was what Cass had said. Her interest must be as obvious as two heads.

"Josh, do you know him? Why didn't you say so?"

"No, I don't but I want to meet him too. I think you can arrange it."

"Me? How? I haven't the foggiest notion where he lives even."

"Shouldn't be any trick to find out, his face is in every paper in the country. Call up any editor. Ask your pal Hanophy. He's probably already interviewed him."

"Of course. He probably has. Oh, I wonder . . .?"

"What?"

"Nothing." She was wondering if it was not very probable that Cass had interviewed him and, if so, why he had said nothing about it? Joshua grunted. What a bore women were with their 'wonders' and 'because's'.

"But if *you* want to meet him, Josh," she continued, "why don't you call him up? He's bound to have heard of you."

"I dare say. That's why I won't. If I meet him I want it to appear casual. You can give a cocktail party or something."

"It's a little difficult for me to invite a perfect stranger."

"Nonsense. You're bound to know somebody who knows him. What are you a Press agent for? Tell him the *Saturday Evening Post* wants a story on 'My Brush With Death' or 'Life In A Fiery Hell'. Tell him anything but get him here."

Tansy was baffled as to why Joshua should evince such an interest in Mr. Bishop. Raw physical courage scarcely seemed his dish. But she knew him too well to ask what was on his mind. Besides, she wasn't very interested. She had an excuse for approaching her hero—that was enough.

~~She~~ was an honourable girl, but when she called Cass to ask ~~him~~ he could help her get hold of Bishop she shifted the ~~emphasis~~ slightly. "Cass, I was wondering. . . . You said you were going to be doing a lot of interviews with The Birches people. . . . Joshua Hutchinson and I have been talking about it, he asked if by any chance you'd interviewed Langdon Bishop?"

"Yes," Cass said, "I have."

"Oh. Well . . . Josh seems to be quite interested in meeting him."

"He too, eh?"

"Too? Oh, you mean me." She laughed a little deprecatingly. "Well, all right, don't be such an old hold-out. What's he like? Is he a nice person?"

"I don't know him well enough to know, but he's attractive, I'll say that for him." It depressed him but it was the bald truth. "Why is Hutchinson so hot about meeting him?"

"I don't know but when he realized that this Bishop is the one he's heard about in politics his ears pricked right up. Wants me to arrange a little party."

Remembering their talk of the night before Cass couldn't help speculating on Mr. Hutchinson's concern with political figures. With all his other interests, was he considering running for office? Rich men had done it before, of course, but in Cass's opinion anyone already as involved as Joshua was crazy to take on more headaches.

He agreed, however, to try to bring Langdon Bishop for a drink within the next couple of days. Monday evening he called to say they would be there Tuesday afternoon.

When they arrived the party although small was in full swing. Cass saw at once that Tansy had completely recovered from their ordeal and was looking radiant. His heart sank. What man wouldn't find her irresistible, especially when he realized she was already amiably disposed towards him? Mr. Bishop was presumably subject to perfectly normal reactions. Cass's own reaction to him had been rather curious. Bishop was, he had to admit, a magnificent specimen. Tall, broad-shouldered,

hard-muscled, he certainly looked the part of the hero. Furthermore, his modesty had been ingratiating. He seemed genuinely uncomfortable when being interviewed and gave the impression that he regretted nothing so much as that his act of heroism had been witnessed by scores of people. He was also an obviously intelligent and able man. Cass had difficulty in putting his finger on what there was about him he didn't like. Was he possibly a little too candid, a little too ingenuous for a man of his position and experience? Or was it—and here Cass tried to be honest—was it because he had made such a deep impression on Tansy?

Standing at Bleek's bar Monday evening he had by chance stumbled on a mutual friend who had known Bishop before the war and who filled him in a bit on his background.

As a young man he had married a girl from his own state, of good family and unostentatious but solid wealth. "I knew them pretty well," the friend said, "and it's hard for me to believe she held any genuine attraction for him. Sally adored him, of course, with that physique and his brains she thought he was God and it wasn't that he was unkind to her nor, as far as I know, unfaithful. I just always had the feeling that if her old man hadn't had a solid paper business Lang would never have looked at her twice. But he was a rising young lawyer interested in politics and Sally Henkel was an appropriate wife.

"I think it broke her heart that they never had any children, and, as a matter of fact, after they'd been married for about seven years she began failing. There didn't seem to be anything specific the matter with her—I guess in the old days you'd have called it a decline—but she declined

right into the grave. Her parents saw Langdon at the funeral and as far as I know that was the last time they ever did see him. Old Henkel didn't like him. For all he was so smart and charming he used to say there was something inhuman about Lang. Still, as far as I can gather, his war record's been admirable. Then along comes this Birches business. Of course, he may be crisis prone or publicity crazy or just plain brave. Hard to say." Cass agreed that it was.

In any event he arrived at Tansy's apartment with Bishop and another man in tow. He introduced the latter first. "This is Dale Burgess, Tanse. I brought him along to celebrate." Mr. Burgess smiled. "I hope you'll forgive me, Miss Delafield. I'm an architect and I've just had a housing project accepted by the city. I was with Lang, he's my lawyer, when Mr. Hanophy came by, so they said wouldn't I come too, and I said I'd like to, and here I am."

Mr. Burgess' pleasurable shock at the sight of his hostess was obvious. Cass glanced at Bishop. He was smiling down at Tansy gently. It was a charming smile but he seemed controlled, not knocked back on his heels as was his client.

Tansy extended her hand. "Mr. Burgess, I'm delighted. And Commander Bishop, how good of you to come. I imagine Cass has told you we were there the other night. I know it isn't anything you came to talk about, but I do want to say I have never seen a finer act. You have our deepest respect and admiration."

"Thank you," Bishop said, "but it's no more than anyone would have done if he felt he could make it. I felt I could, that's all."

Good going, you bastard, Cass thought to himself.

Modest, quiet, strong. And conceivably he means it, he was obliged to add grudgingly.

"Come and meet the others." Tansy led the two men around. Nora, on being introduced, gave Bishop a long, penetrating look. Then she came and stood next to Cass. "I hope you won't think me fresh," she said, "but my money's on you."

"I'm afraid I don't know what you mean."

Nora smiled. "Please don't mind. I'm not an interfering biddy, even if I sound like one. But I'm awfully fond of Tansy, and I have an idea maybe you are too. If you are, I hope it works out for you, that's all."

What was she driving at, he wondered? Of course, she and Tansy were great friends. The way women talked she probably knew all about their early days in Cleveland, but hadn't Tansy mentioned Laurie? To change the subject he said, "What do you think of Mr. Bishop?"

Nora studied him across the room. "I don't entirely trust the grandstand players. I always suspect they're distracting the customers from some sleight of hand skulduggery. I guess in this instance, though, that's rotten to say. He did save a stranger's life at the risk of his own and for all I know he may be a combination of Sir Galahad and Dick Tracy."

"Mr. Hutchinson seems interested in him."

"Case of hero worship, I'm sure," Nora said drily. She herself wondered what was prompting the hearty congratulations that Joshua, standing near the fireplace, was heaping on Langdon Bishop.

A few more people came in and the party separated into little groups, Tansy and Bishop ending up on a love seat with Mr. Burgess sniffing about them like a hopeful

puppy. Seeing them together, Cass's reactions were mixed. They did indeed make a lovely couple; Tansy slender and feminine with her gleaming blue eyes and dark curling hair, Bishop in his uniform looking like something off a recruiting poster with that smile at once strong and tender . . . it was a sight to fill a casting agent's heart with joy.

Bishop, Cass noticed, was paying close attention to what Tansy was saying. Joshua had mentioned the Saturday Evening Post in jest but she had taken him seriously. "I hope you won't think it presumptuous of me, Mr. Bishop," she said, "but I happened to see the feature editor of the Saturday Evening Post and of course we got talking about The Birches fire, and the suggestion was made that you might possibly do an article for them. Would you be interested?"

She did not add that the suggestion had been made by her on the strength of Joshua's remark about My Brush With Death.

"I'd be interested of course," Bishop said, "it's a big audience you're offering me, Miss Delafield, but I'm not at all sure I could do it. I'm not a writer you know, I'm a lawyer and after nearly four years in the Navy rusty at that I'm afraid."

"Oh, of course you could do it," she said. "You'd just have to tell what happened. It wouldn't be as hard as the rescue, you know."

He smiled. "Will you help me?"

"I? Do you think I could?"

"I'm sure you could. I know more about you than you think. Mr. Hanophy's been telling me things."

What Mr. Hanophy had told him in the interests of getting him to come to Tansy's party had been succinct but

accurate. That she was beautiful and intelligent, and successful at her job. He saw no reason to add that her interest in him, Bishop, was intense. Let him hoe his own row.

Tansy's lips were curved in a slightly foolish smile. She felt dizzy. If she stood up she was sure her legs would give way. If he didn't put his arms around her she thought she couldn't bear it. If he did she thought she would faint. "My God," she said to herself, "if this is love, it's pretty bad." Does *he* feel anything, I wonder? But he *must*. How is it possible for me to be this way if he has no reaction at all?

Actually, Langdon had. There was a slight ringing in his own ears as he looked at the ravishing creature who gazed at him with what at one moment seemed to be adoration and the next alarm. If he was not falling as irrevocably in love as Tansy he was at least slipping down the incline, his descent checked only because of a built-in protective device. It was rather as though he had charged electric wires around his heart, the kind that give out small shocks to keep cattle from straying from a corral. They kept his emotions within bounds. Langdon wasn't cold, he was just cautious. Had he been a woman his philosophy would have been that it's as easy to love a rich man as a poor one. He felt it about women as a matter of fact although he would settle for assets other than wealth if they were potent enough.

Sally Henkel hadn't been all that rich but she was a very proper person for him to marry when he did. Situations change, of course. It might well be that a different type of woman was now an appropriate companion. For the moment that was as far as he went. It struck him they had been staring at each other for quite a few minutes. He'd better say something. "Mr. Hanophy says you've done a

grand job in your publicity business. I should think it must be very hard to start from scratch in that field. You're to be congratulated."

"Not at all. No more than anyone would have undertaken if she'd felt she could make it." They smiled as she paraphrased his earlier remark, and then they stopped talking and sat looking at one another again.

Cass watched them. Nora still at his elbow.

"Ever hear of love at first sight?" he asked. "That's the second conflagration I've witnessed in seventy-two hours or I miss my guess."

"Nonsense," Nora said. "That's the effect Tansy has on men. It doesn't necessarily mean *she's* captivated in the least."

"I wouldn't lay any bets," Cass said.

"What are you doing when the party breaks up?" Langdon asked Tansy. "Would you perhaps have dinner with me?"

"I'd love to," she said quickly, "that is . . ."

"Yes?"

She hesitated. "Well, I didn't know if you and Cass and Mr. Burgess here . . ." she included grateful Mr. Burgess in a wide smile, "hadn't possibly arranged something of your own. People often do after a cocktail party." She sincerely hoped they hadn't, yet she sincerely didn't want to see Cass left without plans for the evening, especially since she was indebted to him for the breathtaking gift of Mr. Bishop. "I think that's a fine idea," Burgess said heartily. "Let's all get together." He didn't have the presumption to expect Miss Delafield would dine with him alone. If he could only be included in the party he would be grateful. Mr. Bishop looked at him a little coldly but when he spoke his

tone was pleasant enough—Dale was after all a client. “Miss Delafield has suggested I write an article for the Saturday Evening Post. I’d like to talk over details with her. I thought we might make this one a business dinner, but another time, if she’d give us the pleasure,” and he smiled charmingly, “perhaps we might have a little party.”

“I’d love it,” Tansy said.

“So would I,” said Mr. Burgess. “When? Tomorrow night?” Tansy laughed, but it gave her an opening.

“How long will you be staying in town, Commander?”

“I don’t really know,” Langdon said. “I hope to be here another ten days, but I’m waiting for orders. It could be tomorrow I have to go or it could be longer.”

Mr. Burgess grinned. “No hard luck, old man, but we don’t want to deprive the country of your services. Any time you have to get along I promise to keep an eye on Miss Delafield.”

The first couple to leave came over to Tansy to say goodbye. It was a signal for the party to break up. As she walked to the door with her guests Joshua approached Langdon Bishop, “I wonder if you’d like to come back to my apartment and have a bite of dinner with me, Bishop? It would give me great pleasure and I think there are a couple of things we might have in common to talk about.”

Langdon hesitated. He wanted his *tête-à-tête* with Tansy, on the other hand one didn’t run into Joshua Buell Hutchinson every day. An invitation to dine was more or less a command performance.

“I’d be delighted, sir,” he said, “but I’ve just asked Miss Delafield to have dinner with me. If she has no objection, however . . .” A gleam of admiration shone in Joshua’s eye. Here was a man with a sense of values. Knew

when something advantageous presented itself. An opportunist, by Jove, just what he was looking for. "She'll have no objection, I promise you. Hey, Nora. . . ." Nora turned from Cass, with whom she was still standing. "Why don't you and Hanophy and Tanse have dinner together?"

"Perhaps Tansy has other plans," she said.

"Rot," and as Tansy returned from seeing her guests out the door he said to her, "I've asked Commander Bishop to dine with me, Tansy, and he's accepted. You three kids go and have a good time."

Tansy turned to Bishop, a look of surprise on her face. "I'm terribly sorry," he said, "but there's something Mr. Hutchinson wants to talk over with me. Can you make it tomorrow, though? I'm keen to discuss the article with you."

There was a moment's pause, and then she said quietly, "I think you should go with Mr. Hutchinson. I'll be glad to dine tomorrow if you're still here." She turned to the others. "As I no longer have a business engagement, Mr. Burgess, and if Miss Bailey and Cass are free, perhaps you'd like to join us?"

"I would," said Mr. Burgess with alacrity but he looked rather oddly at his counsellor. Langdon turned away.

Three

"HOW much longer are you likely to be in Service?" Joshua had asked the question as they sipped their cocktails. Bishop was uncertain but he felt quite possibly six to eight months. Now, with the coffee, Joshua was casting about in his mind as to whom he might best approach to expedite the honourable discharge of Commander Bishop from the United States Navy into United States civilian life. The Commander, he had decided, might prove a highly useful adjunct to his enterprises. He was, however, advancing by cautious stages. Enthusiasm would only up the asking price.

"Now that the show's over, what do you want to do?" he asked.

"Well," Langdon said slowly, "the law's my first love, of course, and I've had an offer from Hawthorne, Bridges, and Steele. It pleased me. It's always nice to know you're wanted, but I can't forget my term in the Senate either."

"Political virus got you?"

Langdon laughed. "I guess it's like the theatre. They say once you've got that bug you never entirely get it out of your system. Trouble is, I'm undecided. I don't particularly want to go home, yet obviously a man's got to make good in his own state before he can hope for anything of national scope."

Inwardly, Joshua smiled. So the Commander was thinking big. Good, very good. Aloud he said, "But you've

done both already. You served, what? The Attorney-Generalship and the Senate?"

Langdon nodded. "I suppose," he said, "I might have another stab at Washington. Although by the time I'm out of Service I'll have been away a good four years. People forget."

"What made you decide not to run again when your last term was up?"

Langdon laughed. "That's easy—the war." There had been a second consideration which he didn't mention. The opposition was putting up an impressive vote-getter. Bishop, realistically appraising his opponent's assets, decided there was a good chance he himself might be beaten. Why not quit at the top? That way, if he survived the war, he maintained his record: the undefeated champ.

This aspect of the situation Joshua was unaware of—had he known about it he would have considered it shrewd manipulating—but between the time of the fire and that afternoon when he met Bishop at Tansy's cocktail party he had done a little research. He knew Bishop had a small income left him by his dead wife, so he was pleased that he also had ambition. Many men with the fundamentals assured would consider themselves well off with a Senate salary added and would seek no more. You couldn't buy them. Not because they were incorruptible, but because they had no imagination. They didn't *want* anything. Bishop apparently wanted a good deal. "Are you tempted by the Hawthorne, Bridges, and Steele offer?" Joshua inquired.

"Well, it's a top notch law firm. I'd certainly want to think twice before turning them down. Frankly, I'm

flattered that they remembered me all this time. It's been ten years since I was practising law back home."

"I suspect they thought you were good."

"I was lucky," Langdon said, and he flashed his appealing smile. He was, as a matter of fact, sincere. He considered that luck had played a part in his promotion to the Attorney-Generalship—his one serious rival had been killed in a toboggan smash-up—but he had mentioned the law firm's regard for him deliberately. There was no harm in letting Hutchinson know he was in demand.

The two men sat in companionable silence while Joshua sucked on his pipe and Langdon gently revolved his brandy snifter and sipped the smooth, tawny-gold liquor. The older man watched him with mild envy. He liked brandy, but the extent of his after-dinner drinking was a modest Scotch and plain water by way of a night-cap.

Presently he said, "Why do you hesitate about going in with Brin Hawthorne? I presume, like the rest of us, you want money. Fortunes are made in corporation law."

Langdon shifted in his big easy-chair. "I know they are, but frankly, Mr. Hutchinson, I want something more."

"Fame? You achieved that overnight."

"You mean The Birches business? Nonsense. It'll be forgotten overnight too. No, I hate being cooped up in an office. I need space. Oh, I'm willing to work. I thrive on it, but I like movement. I like getting around and meeting people."

"If you don't go back into law, what will you do?"

"I haven't said I won't and anyway I've still got a little time ahead of me. I'll probably be sent to Washington and I'd like to renew a few contacts down there."

"Politics *and* money aren't unknown of course."

Langdon grinned, "No, but if you play them straight it's not an easy parlay."

"And if you don't?"

"You're a fool. That's always struck me as being the trouble with chisellers, they're tin-horn sports. A few thousand dollars, a new automobile, a mink coat for their wives . . . they risk their political lives for peanuts."

"But bigger game might prove worth while?"

Langdon hesitated. "Not necessarily. If a man enjoys political life he's a fool to jeopardize his chances. The Tea Pot Dome boys, I grant you, went after impressive stakes. They got them, they got caught, and that ended their careers. No, I decided long ago that in politics honesty is good business. But it's not big business."

"You'd like to combine the two?"

"Right."

Joshua was encouraged. Bishop was obviously a man of action, shrewd, hardheaded and honest because honesty paid, not because it was an ideal. Joshua distrusted idealists. They were the big word enthusiasts and throughout history they were the ones who caused the trouble. Murder was forever being committed in the name of God and Freedom. That was true of the Holy Wars, of the Inquisition, of every anarchist who ever threw a bomb for liberty. Certainly it was true of the ideologies of our own time. Joshua was sick of idealists. They upset the applecart of law and order.

"Well," he said, knocking his pipe out in the heavy glass ashtray to indicate the evening was over, "as you say, there's still time. Look around in Washington, and when you get back let me know. Maybe you'll see something that looks good, but before you sign up or definitely commit yourself to Hawthorne get in touch with me. By the

way, whatever you do a little fame won't hurt you. You're hot news at the moment, you could do worse than take advantage of it."

"Look, Mr. Hutchinson, rescuing that guy, it was one of those things. I didn't expect to cash in on it."

"Agreed. But since it's happened there's no reason you shouldn't profit by it. You can't eat glory, you know." They were walking down the long gallery of the apartment leading to the front door. Langdon stopped. "Miss Delafield said something this afternoon about the Saturday Evening Post wanting a story from me. Do you suppose that's right?" Joshua was amused. Tansy must be hard hit, she'd certainly let no grass grow under her feet. "If Miss Delafield said so I'm sure it is," he said gravely, "she's a very able girl."

"She's the most beautiful creature I've ever seen in my life."

"That too. You'd do a lot worse than let her take you in hand. From a business point of view, I mean. She can get you a lot of good publicity."

Had Langdon known of Joshua's own aversion to publicity he might have been curious as to why it was being urged upon himself. He didn't know but the great man's interest was flattering. Also the article would give him an excellent opportunity to see Tansy. He had reneged on his dinner invitation but her image had been vividly with him throughout the evening. He bid Joshua goodbye, thanking him for his hospitality. "I'll let you know if anything happens in Washington," he said.

"Do that." Joshua closed the door on him and walked back along the gallery up the staircase to his bedroom. He opened the door quietly. There propped against the

pillows with the next morning's papers scattered over the bed a dulcet blonde awaited him. She was covered only by the sheet and the veiled contours were inviting. She glanced up from the News. "Where the hell you been? I got here just after nine like you said. That hoity-toity butler brought me in here and 'Would I be good enough to wait, madam!'" Her imitation of Coles' English accent grated upon her lover's ear. "Well, I waited a while and then I got undressed and then there's this knock on the door and I thought it was you so I says 'Come in' and holy cats who is it but his lordship." Suddenly she laughed. "Boy, you sure got him trained, I'll say that. Here I am in my birthday suit and he never bats an eye. He's got his nerve though. He holds out the papers and says, 'Perhaps madam would care to read these. The other young ladies always seem to find them interesting.'" The English accent was dropped abruptly. "That snot! What does he think I am?"

Joshua came over to the bed, pulled down the sheet, and gazed upon her charms. "Exactly what you are. Delectable." She looked at him suspiciously but he kissed her and made certain motions with his hands which led her to believe that 'delectable' was perhaps not an insult. In a moment, he straightened up. "Hand me the phone," he said. He undid his tie and dialled Tansy's number.

"Tanse? If you play your cards right, my girl, our hero is yours, all yours."

"Joshua, whatever do you mean?"

"Just that. He thinks you're beautiful, I've told him you're smart, and he's ripe for the build-up. I'm not kidding, I want you to dream up a couple of good publicity angles. I'm impressed by him. If we can build him up our lad will go places."

"I'm not sure I'm interested in building him up."

"I thought you were nuts about him?"

"I admired his courage, yes, but I don't think his manners are so hot."

"What the . . . oh, the dinner business, eh? Don't hold that against him. He's casting around for something to do when he gets out of the Navy and he saw me as an open door."

"And are you?"

"It's possible."

"Oh, Josh, how wonderful." She sounded oddly happy.

"So long, chick, see you soon."

On the bed his valentine was looking at him with distaste. "Say, when is it my turn?"

"You're third in line, Madam, I have one more customer to attend to."

"Oh yeah? Well, I don't know about the others but this one's not satisfied."

"A little patience and that will be rectified. Hand me that book." He pointed to a leather covered telephone pad that lay on the table on her side of the bed.

Nora's number had been changed the day before and he hadn't yet memorized it. "Damn," he said, "my glasses are on the dresser. Here, read me this number." His companion dutifully read off Plaza 2-3604. She also remembered it.

Only vaguely aware of who was President, unencumbered by any inkling of the sum total of human knowledge in the fields of art, business, politics, medicine, commerce, or science, Miss Clover Delaney had nevertheless one very useful knack—she was a whiz at figures. She frequently made a tidy profit in bets, thanks to her memory for licence plates, telephone, passport, and social security

numbers. Now she automatically absorbed Nora's and filed it away in the uncluttered chambers of her brain for future reference. She formulated no plans but who could tell what might come in handy on a rainy day?

Hearing Joshua's voice, Nora greeted him with happy surprise. "Josh! I've just this minute come in."

"How was the dinner?"

"Oh, very cheery. That Cass Hanophy's a dream-boat."

"Was Tansy upset by Bishop's giving her the brush-off?"

"Well, I think she thought it was a little odd, who wouldn't? But of course, dear, we understand your magnetism."

"Your voice sounds steely, all right, but my magnetism doesn't seem to be working on you at the moment."

"That's where you're wrong. I feel very drawn to you. Shall I come over?"

"Not tonight. Bishop's just left and I've got some papers to go over," he glanced at the morning Press spread out on the bed, "then I'm going to hit the sack." With his left arm he sideswiped the blonde who jerked upright, "Hey!" Joshua quickly clapped a hand over her mouth. Nora's voice came through the telephone. "Will I see you tomorrow?"

"I can't tell till I get to the office. I'll give you a buzz."

"Josh?"

"Yes?"

"Nothing." An agonized pause. "Good night."

"Good night, kid." He hung up the receiver.

The blonde looked at him. "You're quite an operator, aren't you?"

"That's just what you're going to find out," he said. He

turned out the lamp. A soft glow from indirect lighting concealed in the cornice suffused the bed, leaving the rest of the room in darkness.

The quarrel implicit in the withdrawn dinner invitation had long since been forgotten. Long since, that is, in terms of a lover's calendar. Only three days had elapsed because Tansy and Langdon had taken the enormous step that changed their lives: they had fallen in love.

The slight reluctance to engage his emotions he had been conscious of when he met her at the cocktail party had been swept away in the first kiss.

He telephoned her the morning after his dinner with Joshua to ask if she was still willing to dine with him that night. He would pick her up, he said, and take her to a special restaurant where steaks were reappearing on the menu.

Tansy's pride had been hurt but to let him know it would be humiliating. If she refused she would seem to be making much of something to which he probably gave no thought. Besides, she longed to see him.

Over the antipasto, overture to Louis and Carmen's exorbitant but succulent steaks he said, "I appreciate your being so nice about last night."

"Last night?"

"Yes. I did ask you to dinner and then I unasked you."

"Oh heavens!" she said lightly. "Think nothing of it. I know Joshua's ways. But we had a good time, it was too bad you had to miss it." That, she thought, was rather neat. It turned the tables by implying he had been left out in the cold. It was neat but not nice. Inwardly, she sighed. There

were moments when being a girl was hard. If a man behaved in cavalier fashion, should you laugh it off pretending there was nothing to it, that you'd barely noticed, or should you let him know—with finesse, like a woman of the world—that such behaviour didn't go down with you? That you were a person of importance who automatically expected to be treated as such? "If you don't respect yourself," her mother had said when she was growing up, "nobody else will." She had a great deal of self-respect but it was different from self-importance. Where did one draw the line? Every year she hoped there were a few things of which she would be absolutely certain, but the longer she lived the more uncertain she became. It was quite discouraging. She quickly forgot her problems, however, in what Langdon was saying.

"It meant a lot to me to dine with Mr. Hutchinson at this particular time. I'm about to be unemployed and I've got to hustle for a job."

"Is Joshua going to give you one?"

"He spoke as though he might but I haven't any idea what he had in mind or if it's the kind of thing I can or would want to do. Always supposing of course that I don't go back to law."

Tansy smiled. "People usually join Josh's team if he asks them. I hope you will."

"Why?"

Why? she thought, why? Because then, you beautiful entrancing idiot, I'll be able to see more of you. What she said was, "I think you'd be valuable to him."

It was Langdon's turn to smile. "He impresses me as being pretty self-reliant."

"You mustn't be overly modest. Remember how the

mouse helped the captive lion? Nibbling away at those ropes until he freed him?"

They laughed together. Tansy lifted her wine-glass but paused in mid swallow. "Oh," she said, "I'm forgetting the vital issue. I told Mr. Robert Fuoss, he's the managing editor of the Saturday Evening Post, that you're interested in doing an article, and he's anxious to see you."

"You're wonderful," Langdon said, "but I can't do this piece from a 'Hey, look at me,' standpoint. I'm willing to describe what happened but there ought to be some other angle, don't you think?"

"A sort of safety-first business? Fire prevention everywhere. That sort of thing?"

"Exactly. Not just night clubs. Schools, hospitals, all over. If it doesn't go beyond The Birches there's no point."

They were sparking together now, starting a brand new private little conflagration. "I know what," Tansy said eagerly, "you could head up a whole campaign. Joshua would be a big help in that and we'd go to the Mayor . . . there must be a million fire traps in New York. It would be a crusade! And think of Chicago, Kansas City, San Francisco. Why, you could stump the nation!"

Langdon held up his hands. "Help!" he said laughing. "Not so fast, not so fast. To begin with I can't very well appoint myself Universal Fire Commissioner——"

"We'll go to the President! Why not? He ought to be grateful for a big noble bi-partisan issue. After all, you've been a Senator, you can have access to him." Tansy had mounted a new hobby and was off at a gallop. Her face was always beautiful. Animated, her eyes sparkling, she was quite a sight.

Langdon was swept along by her enthusiasm, yet native prudence restrained him.

"Granted I'm for fire prevention," he said, "after seeing that holocaust, who wouldn't be, but I'm afraid I can't make it a full-time job even if I were offered the opportunity. That kind of post and the time I'd want to give it, it'd have to be on an honorary basis and I've got to earn a living."

"Haven't we all? But the fire angle might help you do it."

"Oh? How's that?"

Tansy hesitated. "I'm not quite sure but . . . if I tell you something, you won't tell?"

"Scout's honour."

"Did Joshua say anything to you about publicizing your part in the fire?"

"As a matter of fact he did. It struck me as a little odd."

"Oh, no. With Josh you may be sure it's part of a well thought out pattern. He likes you, you see, he thinks you'll go places." A quizzical look crossed Langdon's face. "You've been to quite a few places, I know," she went on, "but like a lot of successful people Josh feels that achievements don't really count until they've been achieved in his sphere. The good thing is the sphere is roomy. He has so many irons in the fire there's sure to be one that would warm you. I . . . I mean I should think so."

"What do *you* think I ought to do?"

"What you want to do. What would make you happy?"

"When I was in law practice, and later when I was in the Senate, tied down, I used to dream of travelling."

Her heart sank a little. "Do you still?"

"I've had my fill of travelling for the past three and a half years. Right now my idea of bliss is hearth and home."

Tansy laughed with relief. "But seriously, if we should work up some fire prevention campaign, you'd not be averse to it? You'd be doing a fine thing and the publicity value would be great. That's what interests Joshua, that's what I meant about his pattern."

"Do you know what he has in mind?"

She shook her head. "I haven't the foggiest, but he's all for spreading your fame."

As the meal progressed the conversation became more personal. It seemed touching to Tansy that all through the war he had had no one to write to him. He conceded that he had had his father. "He's a good correspondent too, but that's scarcely the same as a personal pin-up girl." Tansy was easily touched but she was not naïve. "Poor chap," she said sympathetically yet with a glint in her eye, "did no woman take a maternal interest in you? Did no pretty young actress from the Stage Door Canteen pick you as a pen pal? Ah well, that's what happens to ugly ducklings, it's a sad fate."

She could afford to rib him about his appearance. Louie and Carmen's, while discreetly lighted, still revealed the aspect of the clientèle and Tansy had quickly noticed the interest, the glances veiled and overt of the feminine contingent as they became aware of the Commander. As a matter of fact, while she and Langdon were drinking their Espresso two of the more daring ones, having recognized him from his pictures in the papers, had come to their table to ask for autographs.

The Commander still hewed to the line of his loneliness adding, however, and not without a glint in his own

eye, "The trouble was I didn't have time to make contacts. I might not have been successful of course, but after Sally died, she was my wife you know, I had no heart for anyone. Then when my Senate term expired I got into the Navy and well . . . that was it."

"Those girls in every port?" Tansy inquired. "The beautiful natives—they're only myths?"

"In the Pacific they are I promise you. There, by God, beauty has *got* to be in the eye of the beholder. Of course I never made Tahiti and when I saw the beach at Waikiki it was solid barbed wire, but the few females we did encounter . . . personally I wasn't that hungry." Suddenly he chuckled. "What is it?" she asked. He was thinking of a ribald tale of a Chinese cook and some lonely ranchers but he decided he didn't know her well enough to tell it. "Nothing, I'm sorry. A bum joke. Let's go, shall we?" It occurred to him that it was an arrant waste of time and opportunity to sit rehashing the empty years with this lovely creature who obviously did not find him antipathetic. Since his arrival Stateside he had to some extent made up his deprivations, notably with one of the ladies who was in his party at The Birches but her husband had returned to town the next day. Langdon suddenly felt free, happy, and enterprising.

The unromantic yet well tested interior of a New York taxi was the site of their first embrace. The driver, an ageing man, sat with his shoulders hunched over his wheel glancing disinterestedly into the rear view mirror when he stopped for a red light. Sex on wheels was an old gambit to him. Whatever vicarious titillation he might have experienced in his youth at the behaviour of his more uninhibited fares had long since faded. Now what he thought,

if he thought about them at all, was 'Dopes'. That's the way he and Sadie had begun, in Joey Boscowitz' hack. That was twenty-five years ago, and now he had three kids and two grandchildren and a flat in Jamaica and old Ben the brown dog who was going on twelve. Sex you could have. His passengers were only too eager to grasp it.

Langdon kissed Tansy softly at first, tentatively, then more searchingly as passion flared between them. When the cab slowed at her door he withdrew his hand from her breast still keeping one arm around her shoulders to steady her against him. "Oh, my dear." Her words were no more than a breath. Half twisting on the seat, dropping one knee, he pushed back his overcoat, extracted a bill from his pocket and gave it to the driver. "Keep the change." The man grunted. That was the small advantage of Dopes, the percentage worked in your favour. Fifty-five cent ride, forty-five cent tip. He'd once got five bucks when the clock showed a dollar twenty. The guy was in a hurry, but having overheard fragments of their conversation the driver figured that particular Romeo had only just begun the ride the dame was taking him on. It would have made him laugh had laughter ever been his forte.

Langdon's thoughts were whirling. As they went up in the elevator to her apartment he gripped her hand tightly behind the elevator man's back. He smiled reassuringly but she was pale and kept her face turned away from him. As she tried to fit the key in the lock her hand shook so that he took it from her and opened the door. She went in, and he followed her and closed the door and fitted the safety chain into its slot. Instantly they were in each other's arms. Earlier, before he picked her up for dinner, he thought of things he might say should the evening progress along

certain lines. Now there was no room, no time for words, their desire was too urgent.

Their swift undressing was accompanied by kisses, caresses, soft laughter, endearments breathed into her hair, the imprint of her teeth on his shoulder. He lifted her on to the bed and lay down beside her. They were well mated, each searching for and discovering in the other the sensitive subtle areas of delight. Their caresses sharpened pleasure to an almost unendurable degree until the surging wave overcame them and they reached together their full, prolonged, and joyful climax.

Later, much later, she said, "I don't understand. How could the idea ever have arisen that such joy is sinful?"

"My darling, you do not feel that I have seduced you? That you are a fallen woman?"

"Oh, you seduced me all right, but I am a triumphant woman." She stretched and gave a tremendous yawn, stopping midway in a kind of gurgle. "As a matter of fact it can't be a sin. Do you know how I know?"

He kissed the tip of her nose. "How?"

"Because I feel good and kind. I'd like to help someone. When I've done a bad thing I feel awful, scratchy and mean. Full of self-justification."

He lay propped on one elbow tracing the line of her brows with his finger. She had never known such bliss, and then Cass drifted into her consciousness. She turned her head, pretending to cough a little. Of all the indiscreet times for a visitation! But indignation died aborning. She thought kindly of this old love. Poor chap, she could afford compassion. He had nothing but a nagging wife in Cleveland while she held the world in her arms. She put her arms around Langdon. The feel of his smooth skin was a benison.

After a while they loved again and slept. Shortly before four he woke up and looked at his watch. Beside him, Tansy stirred. "My God, woman, do you know what time it is?"

She giggled. "Me woman, you man."

"And an inspired arrangement but frankly there's nothing more I can do about it at present. It's almost four a.m., time to refuel. What kind of a housekeeper are you? Are you merely passion's toy or is there food in the icebox?"

"Sir! How dare you impugn my domesticity?"

She got out of bed and slipped into a dressing gown. Langdon put on his shorts and undershirt and his shoes.

"Poor darling," she said, "I feel rather embarrassed."

"What about?"

"I have no slippers or dressing gown to offer you."

"You should only feel embarrassed if you had. I might not think you were maidenly."

"Do you? I mean, did you when you first met me?"

"Well, I didn't figure it out scientifically but if asked to estimate percentages I should have said that it was unlikely that a girl with your looks living in New York and over sixteen was a maiden."

"Do you think I'm pretty?"

"You're beautiful, you must know that. But you've got something else."

"What?"

"Sex."

"Darling . . ."

"No you don't. Come on, let's cook."

"Oh darling, just a minute. This is such a delicious conversation. Tell me about how sexy I am."

He gently touched her jaw with his closed fist. "I don't quite know how it is, you haven't got balloons for breasts,

although what you have, God knows, is appetizing, and actually I'd say you were a little slab-assed . . ."

"Commander Bishop!"

"Sue me. But when I look at you and touch you . . . down Rover, down boy."

Tansy's deep laugh boomed softly, but in a minute she said seriously, "Do you think I've had many lovers?"

"I don't know, but you are not inexperienced."

"I've had one."

"I see. In a way I wish there had been more."

"What a funny thing to say."

"No. Then I'd think you hadn't really cared about any of them. Were you very much in love?"

"We liked each other and it was wartime. I'm not using that as an alibi but it made happiness seem urgent. Do you mind?"

"Who am I to mind? When a man is handed heaven on a platter he accepts it."

"My dearest. What a lovely, lovely thing to say."

"What I'm about to say is less lovely. Whatever may have happened before—that's between you and your past, but from here on in you're mine. The no trespassing sign is up with letters a mile high, understand? And if any guy comes around . . ."

Her eyes were dancing, "What would you do?"

"Castrate the son of a bitch."

"My love, how *medieval* of you. I feel just like Héloïse. Do you feel like Abélard?"

"Have I been acting like Abélard?"

"Oh, I've got it wrong, haven't I? I mean before it happened to him, poor pet. What a ghastly fate. Darling, do take care of everything for my sake, won't you?"

"Never fear. It's the other guy, the poacher, who'd be Abélard, get it?"

"Yes, my lord, I am now abreast of you." She suited the action to the words, coming and standing so close against him that he had to back up to keep from losing his balance. He put his arms around her, and, laughing, they went into the kitchen to make scrambled eggs.

He wanted to help her wash up but she wouldn't hear of it. "I'll have to be getting breakfast again in a few minutes, anyway. We've just done it hind end first, I've had the eggs. Since you say you've got to go, Angel, I'll try to get a little nap, then I'll have my bath and coffee and orange juice."

"Darling, I must go. I need a clean shirt and a shave and I have to show up with my little brief case bright and early at 90 Church Street."

"When you come back, bring a razor? It will be domestic and I'll feel secure." She laughed in self-mockery but she needed to know he was coming back and when.

He came back that night and the next. The third morning when he arrived at Navy Headquarters he found orders to proceed at once to Washington. "I doubt if it will be for long though, darling," he said to Tansy over the telephone. "A week or ten days at the most."

"Ten days! Lang, that's a lifetime."

"Sweetie, I know. It's hell but it may work in our favour. It may mean that the separating process will go more quickly than I think."

"I'll speak to Josh. What's he got all those millions and all that influence for if he can't pull a few wires? He can say you're *vital* to one of his *vital* enterprises."

To her disappointment her lover reacted to this forthright feminine approach with alarm. "Honey, please! Let's leave the eminent Mr. Hutchinson out of this. You don't realize what a black eye that could give me . . . any interference in the due and majestic process of Navy protocol."

"But darling, the military is bound *round* with red tape, everybody knows that. That snafu business is famous."

"I know, but believe me it's better for me to unwind it slowly than to have Hutchinson going over the heads of command in an attempt to cut it. Now be a good girl and *don't* interfere."

At her end of the wire Tansy grumbled and mumbled but perforce agreed to keep her hands and those of her powerful friend out of the machinery of the United States Navy.

"You mark my words," she said later to Nora, "the day will come when there are women presidents and prime ministers and it'll be *Utopia*. They won't be so stupid as to send men away to fight."

The first night Langdon was out of town Tansy dined with Cass. It was not that she swiftly turned to another the instant her lover was away but Cass, suspicious of the pattern events were likely to follow, had been calling her every morning since the cocktail party asking for a date. Reluctant to tell him that she and Langdon had become lovers, uneasily aware that he might guess it, she put him off with excuses, saying she had business dinner with clients. When, however, ten minutes after Langdon told her he was going to Washington Cass called again, realizing that she would have to see him sometime, she agreed to wine with him that night.

"You come here, why don't you? It's one of the nights

I have Oneida and I've been working so late recently I'm tired." Her fatigue was not simulated. She and Langdon had found that the phrase 'sleeping together' was inaccurate. They were averaging three and four hours' sleep a night and his call to duty came at a propitious moment. They needed the rest. Speaking to Cass on the phone she swallowed a yawn so as not to appear rude.

"Do you still like a boiled dinner?" she asked.

"To me it's what caviar and champagne are to a Russian."

"Good. Oneida's a whiz at them. We'll have one."

"I'll bring the beer." He was as good as his word, arriving with a dozen bottles of the best imported lager, but although Tansy was pleased Mr. Hanophy himself was dissatisfied with his largesse. "It's the best I could do," he explained, "because there's some damn' law you can't take it out in a pail any more, but that's when it's good. On draught." She looked at him large-eyed. "In a pail? I never heard of such a thing." "That's because you're too young. You weren't around in the great days of rushing the growler. All right-thinking working men sent their starving little children to the corner saloon to bring home a pail of suds. They sat around like pashas lapping it up while the kids laboured in sweat shops. That was the life! High time that two-year-old bum of mine started looking after his old man, I'm pooped." He sank into a great overstuffed chair by the fireplace and stretched luxuriously. "Boy, this chair is terrific. Where'd you get it?"

"From home. It's one of the few things I got mother to ship on to me when I moved into this apartment. I always felt rather sentimental about it."

"Say, is this the one . . .?" Cass straightened up and

inspected the chair curiously. "I didn't remember it was this colour."

"It wasn't. I had it recovered."

"Well, no wonder I feel at home. You wouldn't like to . . .?" He moved over. In its capacious depth there was plenty of room for Tansy to slip down beside him. It was what they used to do back home. On blustery Sunday afternoons Cass would come to see her and they would sit together in the big chair in front of the fire and listen to Toscanini on the radio.

"No thank you," she said, and moved hastily to the drink table. "Do you want some of the beer now or shall we wait for dinner?"

"Ask Oneida to put it on ice," he said, "and let's wait for dinner. What I should like now is a frigid, bone dry martini. I want to see if you have retained the girlish skill with which I indoctrinated you in Cleveland. As I recall, you got pretty good at them." Tansy started mixing, but his speculative gaze made her self-conscious and she spilled a little.

"Nervous, dear?" he asked pleasantly.

"No. I . . . I just misjudged the height of this shaker, that's all. It's a new one.

"I see." She poured out two drinks and brought his to him. He sipped it critically.

"Well?"

"Not bad, but not like mother used to make. My mother makes the best damn' martini I ever tasted. It was she who taught me what I taught you."

"I never drank all that many martinis in your house. I think your mother thought they weren't for young girls."

"Mother's always been rather prudish about some

things. When I had the gang over she expected them to walk out under their own steam. Victorian but what can you do?"

Tansy was passionately in love with Langdon. The week or ten days without him stretched ahead like a desert but she could not deny that in Cass's company she was on an agreeable oasis. The familiarity was pleasant. She thought vaguely of the ease of old shoes but somehow the metaphor was not appropriate. Cass was very neat and impeccably dressed with understated good taste. Perhaps it was the ease of an expensive new shoe. In a moment, however, the shoe began to pinch.

Something in her appearance, her manner—spilling the drink for instance—struck him as unusual.

"How have you been these last three days?"

"Fine," she said. "A little tired."

"You look it. Been working hard?"

"Yes, I told you. The last two nights I've had a couple of business dinners that lasted till all hours."

"Those nocturnal clients can be exhausting," he said sympathetically. "Get any new accounts?"

"Nothing definite but I think something may develop."

"Funny, I rather suspected something had."

"What does that mean?"

"Not a thing." There was a pause. "How's the Commander?" he asked suddenly. "Seen him recently?"

"I . . . uh . . . I had dinner with him a couple of nights ago. We discussed his article for the Saturday Evening Post."

"I'll bet. What else did you two young people talk about?"

"Well . . . the fire, of course, and what he'll be doing when he gets out of the Navy."

"What will he be doing? Other than what I think he's doing now?"

"Look," she said, "I don't know what you're driving at, but you're being very unpleasant."

His eyebrows rose. "I? Unpleasant? Just because I'm interested in a splendid specimen of manhood and worried about your fatigue."

"You needn't couple them together as though . . ." She stopped, aware that her choice of words was unfortunate. He said quietly, "Who did you say was doing the coupling?"

"Oh, Cass, stop it. Really it doesn't seem to me I owe you any explanation for anything."

"Possibly not, but I take it there is something to explain?"

It suddenly seemed ridiculous to fence any longer. "All right, I've seen him. We're in love. You were wonderful, Cass, you brought us together. As long as I live I can never thank you enough for that."

In his bones he knew it had happened but her acknowledgement made him feel sad. Sad and old. When he had told her he was married she had said she felt old, and now it was his turn. It was foolish, of course. She was only twenty-five and he was twenty-nine. They were young people but their mutual youth was over. It was that, he supposed, that made the difference. Even if they saw each other frequently they had entered into a different phase of life.

Over Oneida's good boiled dinner and their lager she told him of Joshua's interest in Langdon. Now that he knew about the love affair she felt free and happy. How lucky she was to have dear Cass whom she loved and Langdon with

whom she was *in* love. She swerved a little from the all-absorbing topic of the Commander to exhort him to follow suit. "You know, darling Cass, what you should do? You should find someone to fall in love with too. It's such heaven. I suppose it sounds awful, but I can't bear you to have no one but that wife. I know loads of attractive girls. I'll have you meet them."

"Do that. You be my procuress."

"No, I'm serious. I want to help you."

"Please don't. I can manage fine as long as you don't turn into a Do-Gooder, a confounded matchmaker. Why the hell a woman can't see an unattached man without wanting to tether him, I'll never know."

Tansy gave a small hoot. "Unattached! I like that."

"Well, I may be married but I'm not fickle, like some I could name."

"What does that mean? I am *not* married, please remember."

"No, but you will be."

She looked at him over the rim of her beer glass, her eyes very large. When she lowered the glass she had a small foam moustache that touched his heart. "I'm not sure about that," she said. "I'm not sure I'll ever marry."

"Hasn't the Commander mentioned it?" The Commander had not but she didn't like to say so. Of course, she had to admit he hadn't had much chance. Conversation between them had so far been rather sketchy, but she didn't like to say that either. Cass, however, seemed to be clairvoyant. "Maybe he's been too busy to plan for the future," he said helpfully.

"I consider that remark in very poor taste."

"Sorry, but since this is Saturday and you only met on

Tuesday I'd say you haven't let any grass grow under your feet."

She was tired and she began to cry. "Please don't harry me so, I really can't bear it."

Instantly he was contrite. "Tansy, Tan darling, I'm kidding you. I have to laugh, I feel so damned awful."

"Why?"

"Oh, dear God. Where's that feminine intuition we hear so much about?"

She was genuinely distressed.

"But it *can't* be. How can it be? Cass, are you in love with me?"

"Not me. I have enough troubles without falling in love with a beautiful, dizzy dame who's stuck on somebody else."

"Oh, Cass." She reached across the table and took his hand. "How funny life is," she said sadly.

"Yeah. I'm having hysterics right now."

"Cass?"

"What is it?"

"Even if we marry six other people each we'll always be friends, won't we?"

"Sure. Two old friends from Cleveland."

Her eyes filled with tears. "I couldn't bear it if we weren't. I lost you once. Please don't let it happen again."

"That was the war."

"And a wife."

"No, that was the war. I'll explain to Laurie, I'll explain to all my wives that you are my beautiful friend. They may not believe it but that's my story and by God they're going to be stuck with it."

The tears brimmed over and she was laughing again.

"I'll explain it to my . . . well, to any gentlemen I may acquire . . . I'll explain it to them too, and they'll just have to accept it."

"You do that. We'll become famous. Intellectual lovers like Abélard and Héloïse."

"No. Not them," she said with unexpected force. "Another couple. Dante and Beatrice maybe."

"Okay. Dante and Beatrice."

They finished their dinner, and shortly afterwards he got up to leave. At the door he turned. "May an old and true friend suggest that you take advantage of this respite to get some sleep?"

"I think an old and true friend should mind his own business."

"No offence intended." He winked at her. "So long, Bea." The door closed behind him.

Four

LANGDON BISHOP returned from Washington with one piece of information and two convictions. He had learned that his separation from the Navy would take place in three months at the outside, and from conversations with old comrades and old foes in the Senate he had become convinced that the career he really wanted to follow was politics. He had also made up his mind that Joshua Buell Hutchinson was the man with whom he should become affiliated.

Because it promised a more immediate financial return, however, he accepted the offer of Hawthorne, Bridges, and Steele. He would stay with the firm until such time as Mr. Hutchinson might be brought to declare himself. This scheme he kept to himself. There was no point in his colleagues feeling he joined them with reservations. Also, his employment with such an organization had an advantage other than the purely monetary. It would indicate to Hutchinson the calibre of the man he had to deal with. Bishop was not vain, he was merely objective; the Power had gie'd him the giftie to see himself as others saw him.

Some of his pipe-laying he confided to Tansy. She was close to Joshua and he was finding it easy to talk to her. Not only was their sexual life wonderfully happy and rewarding, but as both Joshua and Cass Hanophy had told him, the girl was bright. Her concentration on furthering his interests was flattering. Between them they turned out an

article on The Birches fire that the Saturday Evening Post received with enthusiasm, and out of the five thousand dollars Langdon got for it he bought her a charming little mink jacket which made her very happy.

At the end of February, 1746, he was honourably separated from the United States Navy. He courteously declined the naval suggestion that he stay on as a reserve officer and placed the President's bread and butter letter for his services in his safety deposit box with a silent vow that in another war another man could go.

He was working at his law firm but seeing more and more of Joshua. Their meetings, however, were private, rarely taking place at Joshua's office but usually at his apartment or with increasing frequency at Tansy's.

The four of them, Langdon and Tansy, Joshua and Nora, were often together. Joshua would occasionally try to ring in one of the little numbers he found so fascinating in place of Miss Bailey, but on this subject Tansy was adamant. It was Nora or no one. Sometimes he would suggest a festivity involving six. "Let's get Hanophy," he would say. He mistrusted Cass but he sought to placate Tansy by inviting him, and also, another man gave him an excuse to produce a current fancy in order to balance the party. No one was taken in by this dodge, but as Nora said the more time Joshua spent in their company with his dream girl the less time he would have with her in solitude.

Tansy and Langdon comforted her as best they could but there was little to offer besides Tansy's indignant assertion that, "Some day, by God, he'll get his come-uppance."

Their absorption in their own romance was total, and

Tansy could nearly always stifle the little flicker of uncertainty and puzzlement over why Langdon did not speak of marriage.

The affair was an open secret. They were constantly together in restaurants, at the theatre, occasionally in a night club, and as they were a striking pair they could not entirely avoid publicity but they were known to the Press and to a small segment of the more sophisticated element of New York night life rather than to the general public.

It was remarkable how dexterous Tansy was in keeping their names and pictures out of the papers. Because she always played fair with the Press and was business-like and accurate in the releases she sent out on her clients, the papers were—with one or two exceptions—willing to co-operate with her and respected her aversion to publicity for herself. Aside from her personal shyness and dislike of fanfare she wanted to protect Bishop. Stories carefully planned, timely in their release were good for him. Publicity implying he was a member of café society, a ladies' man, even though she was the lady, she did not consider desirable.

Her campaign to make him known as a brave and admirable figure seriously concerned about the nation's fire hazards was progressing nicely and Langdon was playing his part well. He was actually sincere in his beliefs but it came as an eye-opener to him to learn that many famous personalities were guided by their Press agents to the particular Noble Cause they should become identified with and to which, of course, they were expected to contribute. There was Polio; there was Cancer, there was Muscular Dystrophy and Backward Children. There was the Lighthouse For The Blind, The Preservation Of Natural Resources, and European Orphans. All of these, Tansy explained, were highly

thought of. Homes for the Aged were nice but the newspaper coverage you could get for them was negligible. Therefore, it was advisable for Langdon, whose time and resources both were limited, to concentrate on an easy-to-promote cause.

His public espousal of Fire Prevention and the Post article won him many kudos and a widely syndicated photo with the Mayor. "The Hero of The Birches with New York's Mayor. Cool Head Overcame Hot Flames." The Mayor, at Joshua's suggestion and in gratitude for a small contribution that got the ball rolling, nominated Bishop chairman of a Special Committee for the Detection and Prevention of Fire Hazards in the City of New York. Two major recommendations were doors opening outwards instead of into a building and the abolition of revolving doors which had jammed and cost such a frightful loss of life at The Birches.

Also, on the strength of the article, he was invited to speak in Detroit, Albany, New Orleans, and San Francisco to give his views on fire detection and how best to educate the public on the importance of remaining calm and not panicking in the event of a conflagration.

Lunching one day with Cass, Tansy remarked on the widespread interest Langdon's theories were arousing, but her enthusiasm was abruptly checked when he observed testily, "Just because Bishop was *in* the fire doesn't make him an authority on what to *do* about them. If you were having a weenie roast you wouldn't ask the weenie how to douse the blaze, would you?"

Though teetering on the brink of laughter, Tansy flared in her lover's defence. "That's the most absurd thing I ever heard. Langdon is a remarkably intelligent man. His

first-hand experience has given him an insight into what preventive measures are feasible."

"That's very interesting. You and I were there too, remember? Would you say that qualified us to tell the fire commissioners of big cities how to run their jobs?"

"I certainly would to the extent that at least the fire commissioner wasn't doing his job properly or The Birches could never have happened."

She had him there which annoyed him still further. They got on well together on every subject but one, Langdon Bishop, and since his figure loomed heroically on Tansy's horizon, imbuing her every interest with his presence, it made their relationship difficult. Curiously though, she felt the need of Cass's approval. She wanted his opinion to coincide with and reinforce her own. Time and again she wished he were there to advise or explain.

Take what had happened the other night, for example. She had mentioned casually at a small Sunday night supper to which Joshua had invited them that the people from the Conservation League of National Resources had asked Langdon if he would be willing to enlarge his interest in fire prevention to include the safeguarding of forests. He would, especially as lumber was one of his State's big industries, but Joshua's enthusiastic support of the idea had surprised her. She wanted to ask Cass what he thought about it.

"The very thing," Joshua had said, leaning forward and gesturing with both hands the way he did when his interest was aroused. "Most people believe vaguely that you should preserve forests and prevent soil erosion and conserve the mining wealth but they don't *do* anything about it. You're getting the nation's attention and respect, Langdon. Learn

about these things and speak up. Man in your position could go far, have a lot of influence."

When they got home and were undressing for bed—for convention's sake Langdon kept a room at the University Club which he never entered from one week's end to the other—they discussed Joshua's enthusiasm.

"Although actually," Langdon said, "I don't see why it should surprise you. Mining is naturally his baby—the uranium—and because of his newspapers he's concerned with forests. What he forgets is that they're big interests in my State and I know quite a lot about them already."

"Mmm," Tansy was momentarily submerged by the nightgown she was slipping over her head, "but he certainly seemed keen on your boning up on them." She now surfaced. "I wonder what he has in mind?"

That was the kind of thing Cass would fathom. She adored her lover but there was not much point in discussing it with him. He would tend to accept Hutchinson's interest at face value. Hutchinson liked him, was interested in mines and forests, therefore he wanted Langdon to be. Simple and straightforward. It didn't tally with what she knew of Joshua's temperament. "I suspect," she said slowly, "that our financier chum will soon be making you an offer. If he's unaware that you know about these things he can't think you'll take time out to learn about them just because of a casual comment of his. There'll have to be something in it for you."

What Joshua had in mind he made clear to Langdon a week or two later. The two men had dined together in the big apartment and after dinner diverted themselves by looking over a set of photographs Joshua had just received of Crossways, his place near Thomasville, Georgia. It was

an enormous plantation which he used mostly as a shooting preserve, going there in the fall and early spring with parties of friends and staying two, three, or four weeks at a time.

The house, with its great avenue of moss-hung oaks, was a magnificent example of *ante bellum* architecture, and Langdon was wholehearted in his admiration as he looked at the photographs. "Yes," Joshua conceded, "it's a beautiful spot for a vacation, or it's a great place to die, but for *living* I'll take this. Let's go out." He started towards the terrace surrounding the apartment. It was a warm spring evening and they drew chairs together and sat for a while in silence, gazing south along Fifth Avenue at the fabulous panorama of New York spreading around them.

Joshua was not a sentimental man, which was perhaps why he understood the city. It had little charm, its history, compared to the cities of Europe and Asia, was negligible, it was dirty—after the war it was shabby—and you could die in your own apartment separated by inches from a neighbour who didn't know your name. To be sure, he knew Bunchy Cartwright, whose ceiling was his floor, as well as he knew any man alive. They'd sat on the same boards for years, and more than once he'd given asylum to one of Bunchy's outside interests when his wife or daughters had returned from Palm Beach unexpectedly, but the symbolism appealed to him. The isolation in the city was one of its characteristics he valued most. As far as he had it in him to be moved he was moved by those glowing towers against the spring sky, by the great mauve and violet shadows that stained the air on a winter's evening just before the lights blazed in the skyscrapers. He had hated the brownout of the war and thought it useless anyway. Embraced by its two great rivers, fronting on the vast

harbour, New York was impossible to hide. Since he was in the coal and oil business, among others, the brownout's aspect of fuel saving left him apathetic. He observed the soaring, glittering silhouettes of peacetime with satisfaction. The city was strident, indifferent, and beautiful, and fascinated him as a harsh and beautiful woman might fascinate him.

He finally broke the silence. That was one thing he liked about Bishop. You didn't have to gab all the time. "Quite a sight," he said. Bishop nodded. "I've never seen the Taj Mahal or the Pyramids," he said, "but I don't imagine they can touch this for sheer power."

"No. I get a real boot out of it."

"Of course, the town becomes pretty much of a rat race. I'd give a good deal to have a place I could get away to from time to time. I certainly envy you Crossways."

"Would you like to live in the country?"

"Lord no. Not as a steady diet. Besides . . ." He stopped.

"Besides what?"

"I don't know how Tarsy would like it. The truth is I seem to be pretty involved."

"Well, well," Joshua said, "this is interesting. Thinking of getting married?"

"I don't know. I did it once. But I did it for a reason which at the time was valid. There ought always to be a purpose in marriage, I think."

"I did it once myself," Joshua said. "I forget now just why. Must have been youth and inexperience, but in my case it's worked out very well, very solid sacrament. I've been married . . . let's see . . . damn' nearly thirty years, and haven't set eyes on my wife in eleven. Of course, everybody's not that lucky."

"Or that rich," Bishop said drily. Hutchinson grunted. "I take it you're in love with Tansy?" he said.

"She's a remarkable girl. She's lovely and she's fun."

"And she's smart, don't forget that. In this country—a man wants to get any place but especially in politics, a wife is important. Women unfortunately are playing more and more of a role in politics, and they're not likely to vote for an unmarried candidate. Don't trust him. Forcibly they tend to think wives are indispensable—they have to, how else are they to be supported?—and a man who isn't married irks them. They either assume he's a homo or not quite human."

"I don't believe Tansy thinks about being supported."

"She doesn't have to. She's one of the rare ones. I know it seems as though a lot of women are capable of earning their own livings, but that's in confined, more or less sophisticated areas. You take the country as a whole, it's made up of housewives and club women and they don't earn a cent and don't expect to."

After a moment Langdon said, "Do you think I should go back into politics?" He said it casually but he waited, alert, for the reply. On it his future might hinge. Joshua had been receiving Press clippings on Bishop ever since The Birches fire. He had read the Saturday Evening Post article, he had seen the publicity in Time and in the papers and knew that on his out of town visits Langdon had been well received. Josh made up his mind.

"Yes," he said, "I do. With your personality and experience and with Tansy as a wife I think you can go far. You'll need backing, of course, but I'm willing to supply it."

Langdon's heart leapt. He was in! Quietly enough,

however, he said, "Thank you, Joshua. I appreciate that. I hope some day you'll feel your judgement has been vindicated."

"I'm sure I shall. For the present, however, it might be wise for you to stay with Hawthorne until we can get squared away on exactly what you're going to do, and build some kind of an organization. By the way, have you any particular goal in mind?"

"Well, of course, I don't know that I could get re-elected to the Senate even if I tried, and as I told you before, I'm interested in money."

"Good. I admire your candour. So is everybody, but they feel they have to pretend to a nobler aspiration. I understand you can't take it with you and if I ever get to a world where money is not the medium of exchange I'll be pleased to go along with the natives, but while we're in a place where we need it what I say is, get it. What do you want to do with money? Good works? High living?"

"A little of both. I've managed to live in comfort most of my life but I'd like to own a really beautiful place. Something like Crossways." He picked up one of the photographs Hutchinson had brought out and thrown on the coffee table. "God, what a spot. That lovely old white house glimmering through the trees. The lawns and gardens. All that history and tradition. . . . It's solid."

For a moment Joshua watched him looking at the pictures, then he said, "For openers, I think, realistically, we'd better shoot for an appointive office. Something we can buy. What about a Cabinet post?"

Langdon looked up from the photographs. "Which one?"

"I wasn't kidding the other day when we were talking

about forests and mines. There's oil, there are waterways . . . I see Secretary of the Interior."

"Or Commerce, I suppose. Labour, possibly . . ."

"No," Joshua said, and his voice that had been so pleasant all evening was suddenly implacable. "Interior. I can help you on that. There's nothing I can do about the others."

Langdon looked at him thoughtfully. Was he to be his own man or Hutchinson's? He'd done well before he ever met him, he'd been regarded as one of the most promising candidates for fame on the Washington scene, but that had been several years ago and in another climate. Bishop wasn't averse to work, but the long, slow haul held little appeal. During the war he'd been too close to death too often not to want to grasp life now that it had been spared to him. He was in a hurry. Hutchinson could speed him on his way. He hesitated, however, a moment longer before capitulating. Staring into the future he was savouring almost voluptuously the abnegation of his own volition. Not my will but thine be done. The entrance into orders, holy or unholy, was the same.

At last he said pleasantly, "Okay, Josh, if you feel I have the qualifications, there's no question but that Interior is a fertile field."

There was a triumphant little click in Joshua's brain. He'd won again. Life was an endlessly diverting game. "Do you know MacNamara?" he asked. "He's the man you'll have to supplant." Langdon looked surprised. "But he's pretty good, isn't he? I understand the President's keen on him. I thought you were sighting for 'forty-eight."

"Hell, no. That's two years away. I can't wait. The President may be keen on him and the President's a tough

bird, but even he can't ride out a scandal in his official family. Mr. MacNamara is heading for a fall. All he needs is the smallest trip to precipitate it."

"And how is that to be brought about?"

"There's a certain simple beauty in the situation," Joshua said. "It's got a built-in trap that's easily sprung. When the time comes, I'll tell you what it is. In the meantime, do a little homework. Bone up on Interior's problems and keep yourself in the public eye. The fire business is good, keep building it. Get yourself photographed with prominent people, the way you were with the Mayor for instance. Creates an aura of success."

Langdon chuckled. "Tanse tells me I ought to call on the President. 'After all,' she keeps saying, 'you were a well-known Washington figure and now you're known nationally.' I've tried to explain you don't just ring up the White House and say 'I'm dropping around for a drink this afternoon,' but she's all for it."

"She's right," Joshua said. "These things can always be arranged. Your publicity so far has been excellent, it merely needs to be sustained."

Langdon smiled. "May I count on seven prominent papers to further the interests of a future Cabinet member?"

"Only to the extent commensurate with what the Cabinet minister accomplishes." And as his guest looked a little taken aback, he added, "See here, Lang, you might as well learn the terms of this deal right now. I'll lend you money and make certain stocks available to you at the right price. The stock I have in mind is currently selling at twenty-five. I control it and I know it will triple within the year. I'll lend you the money to buy it. You'll hold it until you've made a long term gain, and sell and pay me back,

you pay your twenty-five per cent capital gains tax to the Government and you've got a neat little pile. You're in the clear and so is your tax record. In the meantime you'll be laying pipes. As for publicity, you'll get from us no more than any other papers give you and probably less. Our business arrangements, yours and mine, will be private, and our meetings will continue to take place here rather than in the office, just as they have been. For the present, the less we're linked together the better. In a few months when the time's ripe a little manoeuvring should land you plumb in the Cabinet. If you do a good job there, you shouldn't have much difficulty getting the Governorship of your State if you want it."

"And then what?"

"You've got a big appetite."

"Not so much that, but I know the bug. Public office gets to be a habit."

Joshua studied him for a minute. "Come on, spill it. What have you got in mind?"

Langdon stirred restlessly. "I don't know. But when I think of my future, there's a challenge. I got through the war alive. I want to make something of the life that's left to me, something big." He got up and started to pace the terrace.

Joshua picked up two or three of the photographs and looked through them thoughtfully. He glanced again at Bishop, at his magnificent physique and intelligent face, and sensed anew the magnetism that emanated from him. An idea took root in his mind. "An old white house, eh?" he said slowly. "That's something you'd really like?"

"What? Oh, sure." Langdon spoke absently, his

thoughts far away. "Can you suggest one I can get at a price I can afford?"

"Well, if it's what you truly want there's one that occurs to me."

"Oh? Where's that?"

"Sixteen hundred Pennsylvania Avenue."

Langdon's wandering thoughts snapped into focus. "What?"

"Not a bad neighbourhood. Quite a lot of history and tradition if that's what you like."

"What kind of a leg-pull is this?"

"None at all. I'm serious. I admit the idea just occurred to me, but I don't know why it isn't feasible. Somebody's got to tackle the job. You were born in this country, weren't you?"

"Sure. Seattle, Washington. My parents moved when I was three."

"Then why not? Anyone can be President who's born in the continental United States and attains the age of thirty-five, if he can get elected. How old are you, by the way?"

"Forty-one."

"Plenty of time for a build-up. How does the idea strike you?"

"I don't know," Langdon said. "I'm numb."

"Oh, come, Commander. Sitting there when Congress convened, listening to a State of the Union Message, did it never occur to you, does it not occur to every Senator, that maybe someday . . .?"

The two men looked at each other. "Mr. President," Joshua said with a sardonic smile. "Has quite a ring, hasn't it? Might even happen without your being Governor. Our present lad never governed anything. Democracy's a

great system. Friends in the right places, a handy death or two and you're in. And as good old Warren Gameliel proved, ability is not necessary. Mind you, I'm not drawing any invidious comparison; you've got ability, plenty of it, and if the time does come when you're pitching for the Presidency, my papers will back you to the hilt."

It occurred to Bishop that they undoubtedly would, as what could be more convenient for a man as ubiquitous as was Joshua Buell Hutchinson in the nation's business than to have the President of the United States indebted to him? That was a fantastic dream, however. In the meantime, there were two things he wanted to know. "You mentioned MacNamara was heading for a fall," he said. "How? Why?"

"I can't tell you that just at present."

The clandestine love affair was something Joshua wanted to be kept secret, certainly as long as Bishop himself was vulnerable in the same way. It was true that neither he nor Tansy was married to other people as was the case with MacNamara and his mistress, but under the circumstances Bishop might have a fellow-feeling for him. He might be reluctant to blackmail a man whose emotions he could well understand. Politics, Joshua reflected wryly, did indeed make strange bedfellows; here he was for once in a way espousing virtue. Those who practised it were likely to be a little resentful of those who didn't. Bishop must be brought to the altar without delay.

"About Tansy," he said abruptly. "I take it she's crazy about you?"

"I think she's in love with me, yes. Just as I'm in love with her."

"But so far you haven't mentioned marriage?"

"Well, it's a funny thing, love as such has never seemed to me a reason for marriage. I had a French grandfather, I suppose I inherited from him the idea that marriage is a business partnership and love and sex are something else again."

"I'd agree with Gramps," Joshua said, "and I think the time has come for you to go into business."

"With Tansy?"

"Is there anybody else?"

"Good lord, no. You startled me, that's all. She's a darling, and I've never been happier. I just never thought of marriage as necessary."

"She's a woman, and to them marriage is always necessary. From the standpoint of your career it's necessary to you too. Don't give people a chance to gossip about you. Besides, you're getting a bargain. She'll continue to help you professionally just as she's been doing, only she'll put even more enthusiasm into her efforts—and she's beautiful and dresses well. God knows the public could do with a beautiful woman in the White House. It's been a long, hard winter. You'd get a million votes on the strength of her looks alone."

This brought them, more easily than Langdon had anticipated, to his second question. "You've perhaps heard," he said, "that my wife left me an income?"

Joshua, who had found out to the penny how much it was, said vaguely, "Yes, I had heard something of the sort. I've no idea what it is, of course."

"It comes to a little under eight thousand a year. If I remarry, it stops. Those were the terms of Sally's will. Since legally she wasn't obligated to leave me a cent, I was lucky to get anything." He smiled a little wryly. "At that,

~~I guess she was generous—for a woman. I continue to get the money for a year after I'm married. Severance pay, so to speak, but that's the end."~~

"Don't beef. Plenty of young couples start out with less. The first two years of my married life I wasn't making over five thousand."

"Thirty years ago? That wasn't too bad. Also, you progressed quickly. As long as I stay with Hawthorne I'm all right, but if I should leave them . . . the loan . . . when would you make it and how much will it be?"

"I'll make it now. What would you say to a quarter of a million?"

Bishop, who was about to light a cigarette, blew out the match and stared at him. "As much as that? How can you be sure I could ever pay it back?"

"Don't worry. With the stocks you're getting you'll be able to."

"That's pretty generous."

"The stakes are pretty high," Joshua said drily.

"Well, under those circumstances I suppose I might think about getting married."

"I advise you to because that's the only condition on which you get the loan."

Langdon drew in his breath. It was on the line, all right. Purchase price two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, his the services to be rendered. The altitude, perhaps, the seventeenth floor from which the kingdoms of the world were being displayed, made him a trifle dizzy. "I wonder if I might have a drink?"

Joshua was at once the host. "By all means. Help yourself. That table just inside the door."

"Shall I make something for you?"

"Thanks, no." When Langdon came back on to the terrace he found Joshua leaning on the parapet looking out over the city. He came and stood beside him, raising his glass in an automatic toast, but his mood was cluttered. He was grateful, he was exhilarated, he was just a little complacent. His worth had been recognized and with more liberality than he would have dared hope. He seemed to have Joshua Buell Hutchinson pretty much where he wanted him; on the giving end. Once he had money, once in a position of authority, he might, if he wanted to, turn the tables. It would be he who would wield the power. For the time being, of course, he was constrained. Hutchinson drove with a tight rein, that was obvious. Langdon respected his ability and success but he had a pretty good idea he wasn't going to like him.

Had he known these thoughts, Joshua would not have been disturbed. The idea of Bishop getting out of hand would have made him laugh. Also, Joshua was not haunted by the need to be popular. If he was obeyed and respected by men and acquiesced to by women he didn't have to be loved as well. He always thought that people who went around asking for love put an unnecessary strain on human relationships. This acceptance, indeed this welcoming of the direct approach, uncomplicated by soulful niceties and emotional entanglements, led to his candid interest in eroticism. "Tell me about Tansy," he said chunmily. "I've tried to make her a dozen times but no luck. Yet she doesn't strike me as a frigid little piece and apparently with you she's not. What's she like?"

Langdon wasn't ethical but sexually he was scrupulous and the remark shocked him. Hutchinson could command his marriage but he did not feel obligated to discuss the

bride. "She is charming," he said coldly and drained his drink in a long swallow.

"I'm sorry about the marriage deal," Joshua continued amiably, "but you know yourself I'm right. Politically she'll be invaluable to you. You'll have to play it straight, of course, you can't afford to take any chances. Tough, but who has everything?"

"I played it straight with my first wife," Langdon said, "and I wasn't even in love with her. I am with Tansy."

"Bully for you." Joshua's tone was indifferent but it suddenly sharpened. "There's no chance of her jibbing, is there? I mean, she really is crazy about you?"

"I hope so."

"Where does that fellow Hanophy come in?"

"As far as I know he doesn't come in at all. They're simply old friends. She likes him and since he's a newspaperman and she's in the publicity business she sees something of him."

"Do you like him?"

"Not particularly."

"Neither do I. Too-damn' snoopy. I'd be interested to know where he got some of the dope for that article he did about me."

Langdon had seen the piece in question, but though the writer had obviously not been impressed by Mr. Hutchinson's reputation it seemed to him reasonably dispassionate. He did not, however, wish to seem to approve if it had met with Joshua's displeasure. "Were his facts accurate?" he asked.

"Too damned accurate. Must be a leak some place in the organization. I'll bawl hell out of the bastard who told if I can find out who it is."

"Still, it seems to me the overall impression it would leave with a reader was one of a powerful organization brilliantly run."

Suddenly Joshua laughed. "By God, I thought so myself and that's the truth. Maybe I owe Hanophy a debt after all, although I can't believe the result was intentional. Damn' smart aleck, if you ask me, and I never could see why Tanse is so nuts about him."

Langdon found the animosity he was building up towards Hutchinson beginning to thaw. He didn't doubt Tansy's love for himself nor that she would happily marry him, but her obvious devotion to Cass puzzled him too. "She's always wanting his opinion," he said irritably.

"Who? Tanse?"

"Yes."

"Well, my advice there is to play it cagey. Never make a confidant of a newspaperman, that's pouring water into a sieve. On the other hand, Hanophy's got influence. Keep in with him as much as you can. When will you get married? The sooner the better because already there's a lot of talk about you. I'll give you the wedding, we'll have it in the big drawing room here."

"I'll have to ask the lady. Also, it depends a little on what happens at Hawthorne, Bridges, and Steele. When I get out of there, I mean, which in turn depends on when you let me have the money."

"I told you. Immediately. I'll give you a cheque tomorrow. You endorse it and hand it back and I buy the stock for you." He smiled expansively, but if he had expected Langdon to fall in with the offer he was mistaken. The younger man looked at him for a moment and set his empty glass down on the parapet.

"That's not so good," he said quietly. "That would leave you with an endorsed cheque made out to me and no evidence that it was anything but an outright gift. Also, regardless of the confidence that exists between us there's nothing that says you have to buy the stocks in my name. You'd have them and the cancelled cheque as well."

Langdon felt that his legal sense might be overriding his discretion, but it couldn't be helped. That kind of trap he couldn't fall into. Somewhat to his surprise, Joshua chuckled. "You feel the evidence of the cancelled cheque might be damning, eh?"

"Don't you?"

"Of course it would. Just wanted to make sure you realized it."

"You wouldn't be backing me if you thought I was a fool, would you?"

"What would you suggest?" Joshua asked.

"Well, I think the simplest and most business-like way is for us to draw a paper whereby you agree to lend me the money, I buy the stock myself and leave it with you as collateral. That way there'll be evidence that it is a loan, not a bribe."

Joshua looked at him with an amused gleam of admiration. He respected a man who could take care of himself. His assessment of Bishop was being vindicated. "Since you're a lawyer, you want to draw up the document?"

"I should prefer to," Langdon said quietly.

"Go to it. Bring it to me and I'll sign it. In the meantime, bone up on natural resources, whatever will help you in the department. It will also stand you in good stead in that fine, old white house you may be getting into." He thrust out a hand.

“Well, good night,” he said abruptly. “Finish your drink and close the door after you. I’m off to bed.” And he departed in the somewhat disconcerting way he occasionally had when he was sleepy, leaving his guest on the terrace gazing into the New York night and into his future.

Five

A LITTLE after midnight, half asleep, waiting for the sound of a key in the door, Tansy was awakened by the telephone. It was Langdon.

"Sweetie, I'm sorry to disturb you but I thought I'd better call or you might worry. I won't be over tonight."

"Oh, Langdon, darling, I'm wanting you so much."

"Me too, but it's late and I've got a business breakfast in the morning, fellow I've got to see before I get to the office. Tomorrow night all right?"

"Of course but it's a long way off."

"We'll make up for lost time."

Now she was thoroughly awake. "How did the evening with Josh go?"

"Very well. Very interesting. I'll have a lot to tell you. Good night, dear. Sleep well."

"Good night, my love." She hung up reluctantly. Her voice had been warm and inviting, Langdon was half tempted to go around to the apartment but he decided against it and leaving the small bar from where he had been telephoning he walked back to the University Club through the warm spring night. He needed time to digest the evening.

Lawrence MacNamara was no more than a name to him and he had no scruples about trying to get his job. Hutchinson hadn't spelled it out but Bishop had little difficulty in understanding why he himself was considered a good man for the post: installed by Hutchinson he would have to do his bidding. That, at least, was the supposition.

But would he? It would depend on what was wanted. There would be loyalty to the President, he thought righteously, and his own initiative to be considered. Another man could give you a break but once you had it you were on your own.

Walking down Fifth Avenue in the spring night Joshua's sardonic inflection echoed in his ears. "Mr. President." Well, why not. He wouldn't be the first dark horse in history. Look at Wendell Willkie. True, Willkie had lost the Presidency but over twenty-two million people believed in him and voted for him. He had had great popularity without ever having held political office or run up a distinguished war record and he, Bishop, was a proven vote-getter. Why shouldn't his chance be good? Alone on the dark street he threw back his head and laughed softly.

Later he thought of Tansy, of what Joshua had said about her mere looks being worth a million votes. How would she look, he wondered, when he asked her to marry him? He hadn't intended marriage but it might work out very well. A great many men would find her attractive. They might well make concessions in his favour in order to win her gratitude.

Walking, he gazed dreamily up at the stars. The very constellations seemed to form themselves into the classic tableau: the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court administering the oath of office to the new President. Langdon almost felt the book under his hand. Arriving at the University Club, he undressed quickly and got into bed, and almost at once fell into the tranquil sleep of the well bestowed.

The next evening after dinner Langdon sat in the big

chair with Tansy opposite him. She had brought out her needlepoint—she was making squares for a rug—and stitched as she waited for him to tell her the news. Throughout dinner he had steered clear of his conversation with Joshua saying he wanted to keep all that till afterwards, till they'd finished eating and done the dishes. Dinner had not been silent, however, for Tansy was full of her day and a new account she had closed, for Tawny Velvet Whisky.

"And it really is good, darling, a beautiful colour and very suave. I tasted it *and* we can get it wholesale. Isn't that lovely? We'll be potted the whole time."

"No, just weekends. The rest of the time we're going to be pretty busy."

"We are?" she asked happily. "What are we going to be doing?"

"Wait till after dinner." Now it was after. They had finished coffee, and Langdon, who had brought champagne to underscore the great occasion—for he meant to propose—said that as soon as it was sufficiently chilled they would crack the bottle. It protruded from a bowl of ice on a nearby table. Tansy fidgeted, waiting impatiently for his story.

"Well," he said, "hang on tight, here we go." She dropped the needlepoint in her lap and listened as he proceeded to tell her of his conversation with Hutchinson. When he finished outlining the plan for his assumption of the Secretaryship of the Interior she looked thoughtful. "I think it's wonderful, of course, Lang, and I don't doubt for an instant that you'd be grand in the job but what about the present man, isn't he going to object? Is there any reason for him to resign? It seems to me I read just the other day that he was pretty good."

"I think he is and I told Joshua as much, but I gathered from what he said that MacNamara is going to resign for personal reasons. Keep that under your hat because it's not generally known, but I take it Josh has got it via the smoke signals."

This slight distortion of what had actually been said did not trouble him. He was somewhat in the dark himself and although Joshua's remarks had not implied voluntary resignation on MacNamara's part it was entirely possible that something of the sort was involved. "Anyway," Langdon continued, "Josh seems to feel the time is ripe for a change and that I'm the man."

"What's the procedure? Does he go directly to the President and suggest you or does it go through channels?"

"Well, of course, the President has to make the recommendation and the Senate must okay it. In my case, the probability is that Joshua will speak to Swazey about it first, and that *he'll* go to the President, who's likely to listen to him since the party chairman is supposed to have his finger on the public pulse."

Tansy got up and went over to him and gave him a great hug. "And the public wants my duck."

"That, dear, is what we have to educate them to. But that's not all."

"Of course not. That's but a stepping stone. I see the White House looming."

Langdon started, "You do?" Her blue eyes were shining with merriment. "Why not? You're able, you're handsome, you're smart in politics and God knows you're *brave*. Why aren't you presidential timbre, I'd like to know?"

"Tanse, stop kidding." She sobered at once. "Lang, darling, what's the matter? I really don't think it's such a

joke you know. Not that I'd wish it on anyone I love but objectively speaking, why wouldn't you make a good president? You've been in Government, we know you're popular with people—look how well these fire prevention conferences have gone. If Josh fancies himself such a king-maker, why doesn't he plump for the White House?"

"Tanse, sit down a minute." Puzzled she did as she was told. "If I tell you something will you give me your word of honour that A, you won't breathe it and B, that you won't laugh your head off?" She crossed her heart like a child. Langdon took a deep breath. "Well, Miss Delafield, it may come as a slight shock to you but Joshua does plump for the White House; he thinks I *could* be President of the U.S.A."

Her voice came in a whisper, "Langdon, my God," and then, as they stared at each other, "When?"

"Not tomorrow."

"The campaign of nineteen forty-eight?"

"Not quite. Ambitious as we are we both feel a little more time is needed. By the way if the Secretaryship comes off . . . then, after that, if it looks as though I ought to run for Governor, if I should *make* it, do you think you could put up with the old home town for four years?"

Her heart stood still. "I? In what capacity?"

"We're very moral back home. I'm afraid it would have to be as the Governor's wife."

"Oh Lang, oh darling. Is this a proposal? Is it for now or do I have to wait till you've been Secretary and are elected Governor?"

Langdon dropped to his right knee, one hand on his heart, the other extended. "Miss Delafield, will you be mine? And instantaneously?" The classic attitude was some-

what jarred by Miss Delafield dropping on *her* knees beside him. He put his arms around her and they rolled ecstatically about the floor, the movement eventually leading to a closer contact than was considered customary in the Victorian era.

A few minutes later as he gazed down at her she observed that at times it was certainly better to be a man. "You have a cushion, you lucky bum, I have the floor."

"A delicious cushion." He rose, organizing himself into a semblance of respectability. "Now, my pretty jade, how about a bit of champagne?"

"Heaven." She pulled herself up and bumped along on her bottom till she was leaning against the big chair. "Mr. Bishop, dear."

"Yes, Mrs. Bishop?"

"Oh, what a lovely sound."

"Well, now that we have consummated our betrothal it's the least I can say."

"When we're married promise me we'll do it that way sometimes? I mean not always just conventional in bed."

"I thought you were just objecting to offbeat activities and what's the matter with bed, may I ask?"

"Bed's heaven and much easier on the coccyx, but this way is somehow more lover-like. Occasionally there's something to be said for the hurly-burly of the chaise longue, don't you think?"

"The chaise longue, the back seat of a car . . . you name it." He brought the bottle and sat down on the floor beside her and they sipped their champagne. "Tell me more about Josh and your conversation," she said.

He told her, then, about the money. "Whew! A quarter of a million dollars. Aren't you afraid I'll only be

marrying you for your fortune and not for yourself alone?"

"It'll have to be for myself alone for a while, darling. This you understand is an advance, a loan that's got to be paid back. Joshua's going to tell me what stocks to buy and he'll tell me when to sell. Then I repay him and pay the tax. The rest, whatever it is, I keep."

"Doesn't Josh tell you what to do with that?" The amusement in her eyes nettled him just a little.

"As a matter of fact I'd be grateful if he would. There's no harm in investing where the rich invest theirs, is there?"

She looked at him curiously for a moment. "Langdon, tell me something. Joshua seems to have told you so much last night, did he tell you to propose to me too?"

He flushed. "What a damn' stupid idea. I may not be a financier but I'm not a fool. I know if I want to marry you, thank you very much."

"And do you?" He put his arm around her, pressed her back against the chair and kissed her hard. "Idiot child. What do you think?"

"I think yes. Oh darling, I must think yes."

"You're damn' right you must. When shall we do it?"

"Tomorrow morning. Nine o'clock."

"Oh that's another thing."

"What?"

"If I tell you you won't make any more cracks about my being a puppet with somebody pulling the strings?"

"Why I never . . ."

"Never mind, the implication was there."

"I won't peep."

"Well, Joshua wants to give us the wedding."

"Then Joshua does know about the proposal!" He didn't take his arm from around her shoulders but for a

moment he was very still. Her eyes suddenly filled with tears. "Oh darling," she sobbed, her face against his shoulder, "this is the most marvellous thing that ever happened to me but I want it to be *ours*. I know Josh's power and I know his propensity for meddling just *because* of his power and his money but I don't want him meddling in *our* thing."

He kissed the top of her head lightly. "You're a very silly girl. Normally I wouldn't have dreamed of saying anything about this to Josh. It is our thing, nobody's but. Only he was galloping along at such a rate, I'm to be Secretary, I'm to be President, that I thought I'd better tell him I had a plan or two of my own so I told him I was in love with you and wanted to marry you and all these schemes of his were dependent on whether you'd have me and on what you wanted to do. Well, he thought our marriage was a great idea and then he said, 'If she says yes I'll give you the wedding.' Honestly darling, the old boy meant it as a friend, I don't think you ought to pick on him."

She fumbled for a handkerchief and blew her nose. "Well, maybe not. I know what a pirate he is and I'm devoted to him but he can be awful. Of course, sometimes he *can* be an unexpected darling—Nora knows that, that's why she stays crazy about him—so if the idea of giving us a wedding makes him happy and it's all right with you I'll say yes."

She scrambled to her feet. "I'll have to tell Mother. Poor lamb, it'll be hard on her at first not knowing you but, of course, she knows all about you."

"I hope not all."

"Well, just that we're good friends and that you're kind of a beau of mine. Her bridge club is poison green

because their daughters haven't got you." She went to the telephone.

"Are you going to call your mother now?"

"No, she's not home. She's off visiting some friends for a couple of days. I got a letter this morning. I'm calling Cass."

Langdon got to his feet. "Who?"

"Cass Hanophy."

"My God, you Press agents are the limit. You don't want it in the papers this minute, do you? I thought this was *our* thing?"

"Now who's a very silly *boy*? I'm not telling Cass in his journalistic capacity, for heaven's sake. I'm telling him as a friend."

"I don't know that that's any better. Pretty close friend if you ask me."

"But you like him, don't you?"

"He's all right, I guess."

"Darling, don't be crazy. But it's true, Cass is my friend, the best friend I'll ever have. And that should make you feel very secure because what a woman feels for her friend and what she feels for her lover, for her husband, her adored husband, are poles apart."

"Well, I do think you might have the tact to wait until I've left before you phone him."

"I don't want to do anything behind your back. Besides, you're not leaving *tonight* are you?"

The overly emphatic spring weather of the day before had passed. Outside there was a raw wind and it was raining. Langdon had no desire to leave but he felt the need of shoring up a dignity that had been a little shaken in the course of their conversation. "If you've no objection I'll

stay but I'm tired. I'd like to go to bed now." He went into the bedroom. "Leave the door open or listen in on the extension if you like," Tansy called after him. She dialled Cass's number but there was no answer. After six rings, disappointed, she hung up. She longed to tell him her news. She wondered just a little where he was and with whom.

She went into the bedroom and quietly into the bathroom. By the time she had performed her nocturnal rites and got into bed Mr. Bishop was ostentatiously asleep. A few minutes later he really was asleep, she could tell by his regular breathing followed shortly by complete silence. She lay for a while too keyed up to close her eyes. She was engaged, at last she was engaged, she was going to be married, she would have a husband. She was so happy she was barely aware of the curious little sensation far back in her consciousness. There was something rock-like about Langdon that she found wonderfully reassuring. His size, his courage, his ability. He was Gibraltar. Why was there this tiny strange feeling of uneasiness as though Gibraltar rose not out of the rocky core of the globe itself but out of slightly shifting sands? In a little while as she thought of their happiness together the feeling passed and she fell asleep with a contented smile. If the path of true love never did run smooth, well, that was the way of the world, it was life and she was part of it and part of love and that was what mattered.

The following morning her zeal to break the news to Cass had cooled a little. Langdon had been sweet, their slight friction of the night before completely smoothed away by a good night's rest and breakfast. It was late

March, they decided on May for the wedding. He left her to go to the office with the understanding that her mother would make the formal announcement after Tansy herself had told their immediate circle of friends.

This obviously was the moment to call Cass but unexpectedly she felt shy. Under the impact of the proposal, elated by the champagne, her first instinct had been to tell him of her happiness. It struck her now that feeling as she suspected he did he might not consider it the best piece of news since the armistice. Still, better he hear it from her than through rumour. Langdon had asked her permission to tell Joshua since her old friend seemed to set such store by her answer and she had agreed.

But she knew Joshua; close as a clam about his own affairs he was a regular clearing house for gossip when it came to his friends. He would be perfectly capable of calling Cass, pretending to ask what he thought of the engagement and thereby breaking the news. She had best beat him to it.

At her office she had her secretary put in a call but Mr. Hanophy was out. She left a message and he phoned back shortly after eleven. "I was just wondering," she said, "if you would like to take a lady to luncheon. It so happens I find myself free as a bird."

"I'd be delighted," he said at once. "Come and join us."

"Us?"

"Nora and me." She got a slight shock. "Oh. Well I . . . I don't like to butt in. I haven't talked to her in several days. I didn't realize you were seeing so much of each other."

"Not so much, just now and then."

"Oh. She's great fun, isn't she?"

"The best." Tansy didn't quite know what to say,

despite the fact that this obviously was the perfect set-up. She would find her two dearest friends together, she could tell them her great news at the same time. A person would think a person would be more pleased than seemed to be the case. "Well, if you're sure I won't be in the way."

"How could you be in the way?" Cass said cordially. "We're both devoted to you." We're both devoted to you! It had the most connubial sound she'd ever heard! Of course, poor lonely girl, come and be with your happily married friends. "Well," she said diffidently, "if I won't interfere I'd love to come."

"Good. Chateaubriand, twelve forty-five. I've got a table."

By the time Tansy got to the restaurant her shock had mellowed to benignity. She was happy that dear Cass had found consolation and that darling Nora had an interesting companion. Actually, when she saw them the warmth and affection she felt for both came flooding back. Suddenly they were three good friends and it was fun to be together.

They ordered Timoshenkos, the vodka and tomato juice cocktails that had become so popular during the war and were named after the famous Russian general. As they were sipping their drinks, Nora said, "Seems to me you're looking pretty radiant, Miss D. I have a foreboding you're up to no good."

"Oh but it is good, Nora, it's the best. I do hope you'll both be pleased." She felt a little embarrassed remembering that neither of them was as keen about Langdon as she was. The friends of my friends are my friends. It wasn't always so but that, of course, was simply because they didn't know him as well as she did.

"What's the news?" Cass asked, though he could foretell the answer all too accurately.

"The news, my chickadees, is that Langdon and I have decided to make it legal."

"Congratulations," Cass said quietly. "It's what you wanted, isn't it?"

"Darling, I'm so happy for you." Nora put her hand over Tansy's. "It's exciting, don't you think so, Cass?" It was the best she could manage. The news was no particular shock, Tansy and Langdon were so much together it seemed inevitable, but in her heart Nora was disturbed. She had still hoped, stubbornly, that Cass would get a divorce and that he and Tansy would resume where they had left off at the outbreak of the war. Now, her emotions were confused. In one way she was glad because her romantic nature was satisfied by the woman's magazine ending to a love affair, an ending she so ardently wished for herself, although somehow she doubted the happily-ever-after motif. Also she could not deny a pang of envy. Tansy had got her man while she and Josh were no nearer the altar than on the day she first met him. Still, there was something shimmering about the mere thought of a wedding, something seductive and warm that intrigued the imagination.

"Joshua told Langdon he wants us to be married in his apartment," Tansy was saying. "Do you think it's a good idea, Nora?"

"Oh, please do it, Tan. We'll have wonderful fun. The big drawing room for the ceremony, I think, and then the gallery and the ballroom for dancing and the bar on the terrace. Terrific. We'll have masses of azaleas flown up from Georgia . . . Gosh, I hope Josh will give me a free rein, I'll dream up something heavenly."

"You'll have to be matron of honour, Nora."

"You bet."

"Cass, will you give me away?"

He shook his head. "You'd better not count on me at all. There's a very good chance I'll be off to Europe in a week or two." It was always possible but as far as Cass knew W.P.S. had no immediate plans to send him abroad. He hadn't any desire, however, to watch Tansy being married to someone else. She looked crestfallen.

"Oh, Cass, I certainly never thought I'd have a wedding without you."

Cass turned to Nora. "You know," he said, "there was a time when I didn't think she would, either, but I always saw myself in the leading role. I'm just a ham, I guess. Can't bear playing a supporting part."

Tansy looked so distressed Nora felt she had to extend a helping hand, although her sympathies were with Cass. "You didn't grab the part when you had the opportunity," she said lightly, "so naturally she had to get another leading man. You mustn't be a dog in the manger." And to Tansy, by way of changing the subject, she said:

"What are you going to wear?"

"I hadn't thought. Do you think white's exactly appropriate?"

"Certainly," said her friend firmly. "It'll be your maiden trip to the altar, anyway. Why shouldn't you wear white?"

Tansy looked pleased. "I hadn't thought of it just like that. But it'll have to be practical, something I can use afterwards."

"Satin's out," Nora declared. "Organdie, maybe, or chiffon or, since it's well into spring, how about a charming

embroidered handkerchief linen, something very southern belle?"

They had finished their luncheon and Cass had collected his change. "If you ladies will excuse me," he said, "I've got to be getting back to the office. Call me up when you decide if it's mull or bombazine, I'll put it on the wire."

Tansy looked at him with amusement. "How do you know about mull and bombazine?"

"Those of us who aren't heroes must cultivate such small accomplishments as we have. My wife used to be a model. Goodbye all."

He left the two women staring at each other. "He never told me she was a model," Tansy said. "That changes my whole idea of her. I imagined her dowdy. Tiresome and dowdy. Oh, Nora, maybe he never will leave her."

Nora looked at her. "Do you care?"

"No," Tansy said slowly. "No, of course not. She's nothing to me whatsoever. I was just thinking for his sake."

"Oh, Tan," Nora couldn't help herself, "are you sure you're doing the right thing? Marrying Langdon, I mean. Is he what you really want?" Tansy's answer was steady, "I never wanted anything so much in my whole life, Nora. Never."

"Then I'm glad you've got him."

Six

IT was a Sunday afternoon in May about two weeks before the wedding. Langdon, Tansy, and Nora sat on the terrace of Joshua's house in Fairfield, Connecticut, looking out over the immense swimming pool, idly discussing their plans. Joshua was in the house talking with Jake Greenleaf, his executive vice-president, who had driven out for luncheon and was shortly returning to the city. Greenleaf was a tall, heavy-set man with a slow manner and shrewd brown eyes. He wore rather old-fashioned clothes, his collars were reminiscent of President Hoover's, he tended to argyle socks and street shoes with his dinner jacket, and he was very, very able. He and Joshua had been associated for years and he knew where most of the bodies, male and female, were buried.

At the moment the two men were discussing Bishop and his chances for the Secretaryship. "I don't think there's any doubt he can get it," Greenleaf said, "provided we set it up for him. We may get a little opposition in the Senate, but given Talman and Kitteridge we ought to carry it. I'm wondering, though, if we shouldn't have a little more on MacNamara than just the affair? It might cool off. Ben Parsons is so much older than his wife he might even die. We'd be left with no lever." "No we wouldn't," Joshua said, "MacNamara's wife would still be around and she's a semi-invalid. They never die. He wouldn't dare leave her or his political goose is cooked. It wouldn't be just us, every paper in the country would raise a stink. What else do we

need? We've got him by the short hairs as it is. Matter of fact we may not have much trouble getting him to go. If he wants the Parsons dame badly enough he might be glad to get out of office so they can both go ahead with their divorces and get married."

Jake laughed. "I doubt he wants her that bad. Mac-Namara's an ambitious cuss and he's got a good berth. So has she, for that matter. Probably no woman is averse to being the wife of the Secretary of State and Parsons is well-heeled, don't forget. He might stand still and even fork something over in a quiet divorce but it's a cinch if there's a scandal she won't get a cent. No, as I see it MacNamara and Sheila Parsons will want to play a waiting game until his term of office expires. By the way, are you planning to have Bishop swing the hatchet?"

"Hell, no, that requires the old master. You're elected, my boy. When the time's ripe you go to Mr. MacNamara and lay it on the line. Either he scrams or we spill the beans. Read all about it: Secretary of the Interior screwing the wife of the Secretary of State. Boy, would that be a lulu!"

"It ought to work."

"You're damn' right it'll work. It worked with Kenmire, didn't it, when he was our Ambassador to St. James? Sam Loman went to him and told him if he didn't beat it he'd get up on the floor of the Senate and say that Kenmire bugged elevator boys. Kenmire knew he meant it, too. That's all you have to do with MacNamara. Be sincere."

"Okay, say when. Oh, by the way, before I forget." Mr. Greenleaf reached into a briefcase that was standing on

the floor beside his chair and brought out a small jeweller's box. "Is this what you meant? I picked it up at your apartment late Friday."

"That must be it, let's see." Joshua reached for the little package. He broke the crimson seal and unfolded the heavy white paper. He opened the box and there sparkling and winking in the afternoon sunshine nestled a superb diamond and gold ring of modern design. "What do you think?" he asked. Jake looked at the lovely jewel with no marked enthusiasm. "Quite a bauble, must have set you back plenty."

Joshua grinned. "It did, but I figure it's a good investment. Every time Tansy looks at it she'll remember which side her bread is buttered on, and more important, which side Langdon's is. To be held by a string is irksome, to be held with a gorgeous ring . . . who strays?"

"Well, well," said Mr. Greenleaf, "quite the poet, aren't we?"

"Nora helped me pick it out," Joshua said. "I think Tanse'll go for it, don't you?"

"She should, but what about Bishop? Isn't he going to think you must be pretty cosy with his bride?"

"The hell with what he thinks. Let's get him in." He rang for the butler. "Coles, go tell Mr. Bishop Mr. Greenleaf and I would like to see him in here. I think," he said as the man left the room, "the time has come to explain to our boy what's expected of him."

"Aren't you worried he may get a bit out of hand? After all, he's got ten thousand shares to fool around with. If he were to sell now at the market he'd make a profit of twelve bucks a share."

"But don't forget he's got to hold for the long term

gain, and even then he won't sell if it keeps going up, or he'll sell just enough to repay me. No, Bishop wants money, he's along for the ride. Besides, he has a healthy respect for our ability to manipulate the stock. We can always point out to him that what goes up can come down. I think actually he despises us just a bit, you and me, he thinks we've handed him power unaware, but if we're geese he's got it figured we're laying golden eggs. No, I suspect he will cater to our whims. Where is he without us?" Joshua smiled contentedly and carefully wrapped up the ring again. He couldn't replace the seal but he secured it with a rubber band from the desk. "I'll give it to Tanse before I show it to him. Once she's seen it he won't have a chance of refusing it. Not, somehow, that I think he would. Our Mr. Bishop is politic."

Out on the terrace Langdon was gratified by the butler's summons to join the two men in the library. When they withdrew after luncheon he had felt a slight sense of exclusion, rather like a child barred from adult discussion. They had, of course, affairs to talk over that didn't involve him but it seemed to him improbable he wouldn't come into the conversation, and when he did he wanted to be a part of it.

As he entered the room Joshua slipped the small package into his pocket and waved him to a seat, an overstuffed chair slip-covered in flowered quilted chintz. "Sit down, Lang. Jake and I have just got around to one, Mr. MacNamara. I think if the President knows one or two things about him he can be persuaded to install you in the job instead. Don't suppose you've heard anything suspicious, have you?"

Langdon looked thoughtful. "No, I can't say I have. I

gather you know something I don't, but I haven't heard any gossip."

Joshua and Greenleaf looked at each other. "Good," Joshua said. "The less it's known the more worried he'll be about its getting known."

"What goes on here?" Langdon demanded. "If I have to deal with the man I've got to have some idea of what I'm up against, haven't I?"

Joshua shook his head and smiled benignly. "That's just what you don't have to have, son. Theoretically, the less you know about what goes on the better. Yours should be the role of innocent bystander. You go into office pure as the breath of spring. However, just so you won't feel we're holding out on you . . . what say we tell him, Jake?"

Greenleaf shrugged. "It's up to you." He knew full well his boss would spill the secret, he dearly loved his bit of gossip and indeed barely waiting for Greenleaf's reply Joshua plunged into the story of the Secretary and Mrs. Parsons. "True," he added, "it's a family matter in that they've kept it in the Cabinet, but I scarcely think the President would jump for joy if he knew about it. Our aim is to appeal to the good in MacNamara. He certainly won't want to embarrass his chief and gossip's bound to spread. Much better he resign."

Somewhat to Joshua's surprise Langdon didn't seem to relish the story. "Poor bastard," he said. "Too bad he has to be got at just because he's in love. Bum break."

Joshua laughed. "Listen to Cupid. But now that you're about to become a respectable married man you can't condone this sort of thing."

Jake Greenleaf rapped out his disapproval. "You can't

hold office in the Cabinet and be two-timing a colleague. Can't get away with it."

"But maybe he wants to marry her and is unable to get a divorce."

"That won't do, that won't do at all," Greenleaf said. "Americans are a highly moral people when it comes to other people's sex lives. Because, MacNamara's wife is a drug addict and a semi-invalid and Parsons is twice his wife's age. Under those circumstances Americans expect tender fidelity."

"I see," Langdon said. "Well, then, the idea, I suppose, is that as MacNamara resigns my name is presented to the President to fill the office."

"You've put it in a nutshell, my boy, and now we come to what you do when you're *in* the office."

Langdon braced himself. He would learn what Joshua Buell Hutchinson had really bought for his quarter of a million dollars. "All we expect," Joshua said smoothly, "is that you will help us in any way you conveniently can. It'll chiefly be a question of leasing certain Government lands which, as I understand it, is often done. We're investigating some uranium deposits not far across the Canadian border that seem to have potentialities." It was a neat understatement. Through their various subsidiaries Joshua and Greenleaf's Federal Coal and Uranium Company held a controlling interest in vast resources that had only recently been discovered. "There is a probability," Joshua continued, "that the veins extend down into our own north-western states. That's what we want to find out, and that's where you could be very helpful. As some of the lands are heavily timbered they may come under the control of the Department of Agriculture. Get them to play along with

us. We use the timber for pulp for the papers and we'll, of course, abide by standard conservation practices, but in justice to our stockholders we must have control of the mineral deposits under the soil as well. With a little discretion the whole business can be done in a quiet and friendly fashion. As I see it, it's the sort of thing where Tansy could be of incalculable help. Men like her, she could make warm friends for you among the people with whom you'll be dealing."

"I see," Langdon said. So that was it, a borderline deal. The Government did lease lands to large private companies, but natural resources, minerals that couldn't be replaced, were usually strictly policed. He might conceivably be acting legitimately or he might be liable to heavy censure. It would depend on many factors, not the least of which would be discretion and his ability to make friends in the right places. For that—Joshua was right—Tansy would be invaluable. As long as she was in love with him he could count on her co-operation. Just how much he would reveal to her he wasn't quite sure. Sometimes when she looked at him her beautiful eyes held a curiously appraising expression that was disconcerting.

Joshua, now that his cards were on the table, his requirements made clear, was ready for fun and games. That was one of his great qualities. He was succinct in his dealings, moving at once to the next order of business. "Let's go out and join the girls," he said.

"I've got to get moving." Greenleaf rose and picked up his briefcase. "The traffic this afternoon will be murder."

"Stay for supper."

"Can't. Ettie has the children coming and she made me promise I'd be back. You be in the office tomorrow?"

"Yes. I'm going down to the yacht in a little while." Joshua turned to Langdon. "Why don't you and Tansy come on board for dinner and stay the night? Damn' sight easier than bucking traffic."

"Thanks, Joshua, I'd love to but I've got to get to the office early. Besides, there's the car."

"One of the boys can drive it down. We'll leave Stamford early and be at the New York Yacht Club by nine. Don't tell me you get to your office any earlier than that, you liar."

Langdon laughed. "Okay, me and Oscar Wilde. It sounds fun. I'll tell Tanse."

Jake Greenleaf held out his hand. "Goodbye, Bishop. A word of advice if I may. Keep as much of your business as possible in your head. I've found in years of experience that the less you have on paper the better."

"Jake doesn't trust the Bank of England," Josh said. "God help us all if anything happens to him. I don't know where the key to the office can be. Come on, let's go out."

When Langdon went into the house Nora and Tansy had decided to take a swim. They sat now on the edge of the pool, the afternoon light glowing on their smooth, bare limbs, applying sun oil to each other's backs. "For God's sake," Joshua said when he saw them, "you two dames are sights. Nora, wipe that muck off. If there's anything I can't stand it's deep fat frying." Nora made a face at him. "You wait and see, the results will be very tasty."

Joshua sat down on the end of a white canvas covered chaise longue. "No doubt, Miss Delafield," he said, "you and Langdon have been wondering if the old bastard wasn't going to give you a wedding present and thinking that the time was getting very near. Am I right?"

Tansy and Langdon looked at each other and Tansy's deep laugh rolled out. They had, of course, speculated on what Joshua's present might be, although Tansy had said he was such a queer duck that one could never tell, just possibly he wouldn't give them anything. "Well, Josh darling, to tell you the truth," she said, "we thought the wedding was a pretty nice present in itself."

"And, I suppose, expected nothing else?"

"We think you're wonderfully generous as it is," Langdon said.

Joshua glanced down at Nora who sat on the rim of the pool, her legs in the water. "Don't look at me," she said quickly. "I haven't uttered. I've been a *tomb*." The lovers nodded in unison. "I don't know what this is all about," Tansy added, "but Nora hasn't said anything about anything."

It was true. Nora had been dying to tell Tansy about the ring but Joshua, she knew, would be angry if his surprise leaked out and Tansy would get more of a thrill from her present if she had no inkling of it beforehand. The one person she had told was Cass who, she thought, seemed a little put out.

Joshua drew the small package from his pocket. He knew that Langdon was not giving Tansy an engagement ring. She had said she would rather save the money for their new apartment and get a ring later when they could afford something they didn't need. It had given Joshua his idea. Besides, as he implied to Jake Greenleaf, his gift was a personal tie, something more binding, he felt, than a sterling silver table service for twelve.

"Here." He handed her the box. "Langdon can give you an engagement ring later but I feel every bride should

have some bauble to mark the occasion. Hope you like it."

Tansy glanced at Langdon. It was obvious that he was as much in the dark as she. She unwrapped the paper and opened the box. She lifted off the little square of white cotton and caught her breath as she gazed unbelieving at the beautiful jewel. "Oh, Joshua," she said at last and her voice was a mere breath, "what can I ever say to you? It's the most exquisite thing I've ever seen. Lang, look!"

Her fiancé gave a long low whistle. Conventionally, he supposed, such largesse should be protested, but it was up to Tansy to do it. It was, after all, her present. Also, he noted that even though the ring was distinguished for design and workmanship and a group of diamonds exquisitely fashioned rather than for one enormous stone, its resale value would still be significant. He was very practical.

Tansy slipped the ring on her engagement finger and went and knelt down beside Joshua where he sat on the chaise longue. She put her arms around him and kissed him. "Thank you, Joshua, thank you. It's the most beautiful thing I'll ever have in my life." Tears stood in her eyes. "I suppose I ought to say, 'Oh, you mustn't, Mr. Hutchinson,' but you're out of luck. I shall keep it forever."

She was soft and beautiful and innocent and Joshua had known her since she was a child. Somewhere in the middle distance of his emotions he felt compassion for her. She would learn so much and she would be so sad. He, himself, having learned that life was a sorry business and also because he played his part in making it that way, was immune to shock, but he was attracted by the less callous, and their pity and gentleness occasionally rubbed off on him. He said to Tansy soberly, "Promise me that you will keep the ring,

Tansy. Promise me you'll keep it, whatever happens." Curiously, it had become something other than the bribe he had first intended. It had become quite simply the gift of an old friend to a lovely woman.

"Dear Joshua, of course I shall keep it. I promise."

"Don't forget."

"Never fear." She was laughing now. "I'll live in it. Nora, Nora, isn't it superb? Did you know about it? And you didn't peep?"

"I knew and the silence damn' near killed me, I don't mind saying, because Josh, the bum, wouldn't say when he was going to give it to you and I've been hanging on by my fingertips. Thank heavens it's over."

Tansy held out her left hand and gazed at the ring with rapt admiration. "Wait until Cass sees it, he'll drop dead."

"Too bad he isn't here now," Langdon said. "Come on, you'd better get your clothes on. Joshua's asked us to spend the night on the boat and go back to town early in the morning and I've accepted."

Tansy kissed him again. "How lovely. Joshua Buell Hutchinson from whom all blessings flow. My God, isn't wealth delicious!"

Langdon gave her an amiable swat. "Get going, sybarite, don't keep your benefactor waiting."

She and Nora went off to the cabáña arm in arm to change into their clothes. "I don't like to keep bringing up Cass because it makes Langdon kind of mad," Tansy said confidentially, "but he's the friend I love most in the world and I can't wait for him to see the ring."

"I told him about it," Nora said. "I didn't think you'd mind."

"I don't, of course. What did he say?"

"He said he supposed it would make you very happy."

"Did he seem pleased?"

"No, I can't say he did."

"I wonder why?" Tansy said. But in her heart she knew quite well, and so did Nora.

Seven

CASS had been no help at the wedding. In the end, he had agreed to come but he was not, Tansy felt, co-operative, and in such a beautiful setting, too. The flowers flown up from Georgia, driven down from the Hutchinson Connecticut greenhouses, photographed by House and Garden, and arrayed about the drawing room and along the wide terraces of the apartment were an incomparable display. Cass, over his third highball, observed that it made the Annual Flower Show at Grand Central Palace look like a child's Victory garden.

The wedding party was a group at once elegant and photogenic, and indeed appeared in every paper in the country and in a three-page layout in *Life*. The bride (Tansy had finally settled for bouffant floor length organdie, lace-encrusted), was breathtaking. The groom cast a green gloom over the emotions of the female guests who, while admitting that Tansy was beautiful couldn't see what she had all that special to entitle her to anyone so stalwart, so handsome, and so brave. Tansy herself felt faint when she saw Langdon in his wedding clothes, and wished they could have been married six months sooner when he would have been in uniform. "Maybe it's just as well, though," she murmured to Nora. "Every woman who saw him would have shot me out of envy."

Nora Bailey as matron of honour and Riva Smith, Tansy's assistant in her office, were visions in Nattier blue, and Joshua who gave the bride away looked rich and quietly

distinguished in cutaway and striped pants. Everyone said he would make the ideal ambassador. Even Mr. and Mrs. Jake Greenleaf fitted the occasion, lending a certain solidity as the family eccentrics, he in his Hoover collar, she in lavish and inappropriate burgundy brocade.

Langdon's father, half crippled by arthritis, was unable to attend but Mrs. Hamilton had come on from Cleveland and was staying as a guest in Joshua's apartment. Joshua was treating her with the greatest courtesy and she was enjoying herself and looked very pretty in beige as the mother of the bride. Waiting for her beautiful daughter to approach down the long drawing room, radiant on Joshua's arm, her heart swelled with love and pride. She was moved by the strains of the orchestra stationed in the broad gallery and being something of a gourmet was looking forward with pleasure to the wedding tea which, having eaten several meals under Joshua's roof, she knew would be delectable. She had indeed only one reservation about the whole glamorous affair. She wished Tansy were marrying Cass.

She had arrived in New York three days before the wedding expecting to stay with her daughter, but Tansy and Joshua had jockeyed her into the latter's apartment. They assured her she would be much more comfortable and so she was but she was bewildered, too. "Baby, it would have been fun to bunk in with you," she said plaintively. "I could have slept on the sofa and been a help to Oneida with all those wedding presents."

Tansy put her arms around her mother and kissed her. "I know, Mum darling, but Langdon's got to have a couple of final business meetings before we go away and as he only has his room at the University Club I told him he could use the apartment. Besides, with my clothes and the presents

the place is a mess. You'll be much better off with Josh."

When Tansy had suggested to Langdon that maybe he might move out his belongings so her mother could stay with her, her illusions intact, Mr. Bishop had demurred. "Just because we're getting married," he said firmly, "I'm not going to be away from you for three nights." Although a little put out by his attitude Tansy was also highly flattered and would have been incredulous had Langdon told her the truth: he was suddenly fearful that she might change her mind about marrying him. He would have been hard put to it to say just why he felt this, other than that she had seen Cass once or twice and Cass, Langdon sensed, did not think as highly of him as did the bride-to-be. Langdon was drawn to her by two irresistible magnets, sex and opportunism, and he had no intention of letting anyone place his prize in jeopardy at the last minute. Her reiterated protestations of affection were reassuring but her fiancé would feel more secure once the minister had actually pronounced them man and wife.

He was now about to do so. The wedding guests were in their places, all in the mood of proper reverence with the exception of Mr. Hanophy who was inebriated and tended to comment not entirely *sotto voce* to his old friend, the mother of the bride. "Isn't the orchestra lovely?" whispered Mrs. Hamilton. "It's bigger than the New York Philharmonic," Mr. Hanophy announced hoarsely. "Joshua wanted to get Toscanini but Toscy got cold feet. Said he liked to play in little places like N.B.C. or Madison Square Garden. He's afraid of jungles. Looka this jungle."

"Cass, aren't you ashamed?" Mrs. Hamilton murmured back. "The flowers are beautiful."

"San inpen . . . in-pen-a-trable jungle. Never saw so

many goddamn orchids in my life outside a jungle. I ever tell you about my trip to South America? Up the Amazon without a paddle." To Mrs. Hamilton's dismay he made a rude noise, child of a hiccough and a belch.

"Cass, hush. Here they come."

Cass turned. A chorus line in shimmering white seemed to be wavering towards him. He shook his head and re-focused his eyes and saw it was Tansy, Tansy the one and only girl, ten feet and a world away. This is it, he thought, this is facing the music with a crash. Hutchinson's whole damn' Philharmonic. Here I am complete with wife and child and there stands our hero, beautiful as the morning, strong upon the mountain tops, waiting to claim her as his own. Double-crossing bastard, I'll catch him out, so help me I'll catch him out yet. And that Joshua. Good old paternal fart. Sling a ring at the pretty lady, sling a ring a ding ding to see who owns her. What a pair of pirates, and Tan in the middle.

"Doesn't she look beautiful," murmured Mrs. Hamilton. There was a lump in her throat.

"Rima the bird girl," Cass said, "alone in the jungle."

"Cass, you must be quiet, the ceremony's about to begin." The bird girl and the stallion, he thought. "S'allegorical," he muttered and collapsed abruptly into the caterer's gilt chair where he remained throughout the ceremony, his head resting against the thigh of the mother of the bride. Mrs. Hamilton glanced down at him ruefully. He was behaving very badly, of course, but the poor boy had made a terrible mistake in marrying that Laurie woman instead of coming back to Tansy and he knew it and was sick at heart. Mrs. Hamilton just wished she felt a little more maternal towards the son-in-law she was getting. Handsome

as the day was long, that he certainly was. Any baby they had would stop traffic in his carriage, and Bishop had the courage of a lion, the affair of The Birches was practically historic. She was sorry, though, that he was giving up what sounded like a good position in a law firm because she couldn't quite understand what his new job was to be, but Tansy assured her it was exciting and remunerative, only for the time being rather hush-hush. "But you'll be so proud of him, Mother, you'll positively burst with pride one fine day, you just wait."

Mrs. Hamilton was reconciled to waiting, but she did like to see some visible means of support. Still, they must be doing all right. They were off to Jamaica for a honeymoon and were moving out of Tansy's little apartment to a bigger place and although she had been too discreet to inquire, Mrs. Hamilton hoped that it wasn't Tansy who was going to pay the rent out of the money she made in her business. She was not giving it up, she had said, and her mother felt that was wise. Still, aside from the vagueness of his job, Mr. Bishop seemed to have everything. His manners were charming and he was certainly crazy about Tansy. The way he looked at her sometimes was positively embarrassing, but that's the way it should be with a bride and groom, Mrs. Hamilton supposed. She just wished she didn't have the disloyal feeling that he was too good to be true.

The service was over. Tansy and Langdon had kissed each other and turned from the improvised altar and were walking back down the drawing room. They would move out on to the glassed-in part of the terrace to receive their guests against more masses of flowers, azaleas and orchids and lilies.

As they turned Cass rose from his gilt chair with only

the slightest assistance from Mrs. Hamilton. When Tansy passed him she caught his slightly glazed eye and her lips formed the word 'Dante'.

"Beatrice." He said it so loudly that a woman two rows away whose name was Beatrice turned in surprise. "Yes?" she called, for now the ceremony was over and it was all right to talk. She was a plain woman with a long pointed nose. Cass looked at her, affronted, and turned away.

In the receiving line he was rather trying too. Whereas everybody else either shook hands or pecked the bride gingerly on the cheek, he took her in his arms, bent her backwards as he had seen Valentino do in old movies at the Museum of Modern Art, and implanted upon her mouth what he explained to an indignant Langdon was known as a soul kiss. "Fertility rites in the Amazonian jungles," he said and gave a tremendous leer. It caused quite a commotion in the receiving line and elicited a hearty "Good man!" from Dale Burgess, Langdon's architect client, who was acting as best man and who, jealous of what he could only regard as his lawyer's unmerited good fortune, was happy to see another chap get his innings, however brief. It was at this juncture that Coles, the butler, appeared. Joshua, standing next to Tansy, had raised an eyebrow in command. "If you please, sir," Coles said tactfully, "won't you come this way, we're getting set up for the Life photographs." Whether Cass was to be in or out of the picture was not clear but it seemed a good way of distracting his attention.

He wandered off with dignity, presently entering a broom closet which he mistook for the front door. It was quiet and dark in there and he sank down into a sweet sleep, his head resting on a stool which had been stowed away till the party should be over.

He woke in about half an hour and emerged considerably sobered to find the revels in full swing. Langdon had opened the dancing with his bride, passing on dutifully to Mrs. Hamilton when Joshua cut in on him and Tansy. Tansy had danced with Jake Greenleaf, held gingerly in front of his convex stomach and was now dancing with Dale Burgess. Cass came up to them. "May I?" They stopped, Mr. Burgess with obvious regret. "Sorry to do this to a chum," Cass said. "You gave me a kind word when I needed it. Let me have a little whirl. I'll bring her back."

"Good luck," said Dale. He was a cherubic little fellow and had fallen helplessly in love with Tansy the first day he had gone with Langdon and Cass to her cocktail party. In the ensuing months he had seen her several times when he had been included in some festivity. It would never occur to him to tell her he loved her, she was as much outside his sphere as if she had been an actress whom he worshipped in the darkened theatre, but he felt a kinship with Cass. He suspected he was also in love and had also lost out to Langdon. He said again, "Good luck," and patted his comrade on the back. "I'll see you."

Cass was aware of the groom's eye upon him but he was charmed to see he was firmly tethered to Mrs. Greenleaf who had playfully flipped one end of her brocade stole around his neck and was drawing his head down to her with a kind of sawing gesture.

"Poor Lang," Tansy murmured through her laughter, "it does seem a bit thick, doesn't it? But we have to be very nice to the Greenleafs. He's a power, you know."

"The hell with him." Cass danced her across the ballroom, through other whirling couples, and out on to the

terrace. They danced past the crowded bar and around the corner out of sight.

There against the New York skyline he kissed her, a long deliberate kiss, and as Cass Hanophy, not Rudolph Valentino. She was trembling in his arms. "Oh, Cass, you shouldn't. I don't want you to. This is awful, at my very wedding."

"In your very wedding dress. I know, it's a scandal but it's goodbye." She clung to him. "Whatever do you mean? You said we'd be friends, you said you'd always be my friend."

"We are, my darling, I will be. That was farewell as one who loves you, this is greeting you as a friend." He kissed her gently on the cheek. "All right?"

"It's all right," she said, nodding and sniffing just a little, "but it hasn't got the same zing."

"I'm ashamed of you, Beatrice, we're platonic, remember?"

"It's you who didn't remember."

"Now, now, now, bickering on your wedding day, what kind of behaviour is that? Besides, you should treat me well. We won't be seeing each other for a while."

"We're only going to be in Jamaica for two weeks."

"But I am going away, too."

She looked surprised. "Where to? Cleveland?"

He shook his head. "W.P.S. is sending me to England. I expect I'll be gone about a month."

"I'll miss you, Cass. New York will be dull without you when we get back."

"Dull, I hope, but comfortable. I sense that Mr. Bishop is not my fan. My presence in the domestic picture makes for friction."

Tansy gave her deep-throated giggle. "Well, you must admit you were awful. In front of all the guests. Fertility rites, indeed! You must have been very, very tight. Are you still?"

"Certainly not. I have had a refreshing sleep." And he told her about the broom closet.

"Oh, that's where you got to." She seemed relieved. "I looked around while I was drinking champagne and eating. I thought you'd gone and it made me unhappy."

"Tanse," he said and he took both her hands and held them tight, "we mustn't kid ourselves, the old days are over but I love you and if there's anything in the world I can do for you I'll do it. Remember that if you're ever in trouble."

"Thank you, darling, but I won't be, I'm sure. Langdon and I are going to have a good life. Oh, we're human, I suppose even we might have spats occasionally but we love each other, truly we do. And you'll fall in love with somebody else, too. Some day you'll have a good marriage. I wish her well, the bitch who gets you."

"Goodbye, Tansy."

"Goodbye, Cass."

"Hello, Beau," he said lightly.

"Dear Dan, hello."

"May I dance you back to your wedding?"

"Pray do."

The orchestra was playing the 'Anniversary Waltz'. He put his arm around her waist and they danced back around the corner of the terrace and into full view of the guests. At the threshold of the french windows leading into the ballroom, Langdon appeared, looking a little white around the mouth. Tansy threw him a radiant smile. Cass

stepped aside and with a bow placed Tansy's hand in that of her bridegroom.

"Congratulations and goodbye," he said. He left the ballroom and the apartment and he took himself across town to Bleek's where he proceeded to get very, very drunk.

Eight

SINCE Joshua wanted Tansy publicized almost as much as he did Langdon, he had more or less taken the campaign out of her hands and was running matters himself. This had caused a little friction between them, she maintaining that it was Langdon who would be in office and that she much preferred the role of wife to that of rival. "Please, Joshua, honestly, I'm not the Eleanor Roosevelt type. I don't *want* the limelight. I hate that for myself just as much as you do." But Joshua was adamant. "You're beautiful and you're an asset to him, for God's sake. Now do as I tell you and behave yourself."

The Life layout had caused a great deal of comment. With the newspaper publicity he had been getting, very little of it from the Hutchinson publications, and the magazine coverage he had enjoyed, Mr. Bishop was now a figure well known to the general public. Already he was being spoken of as a man who might again hold public office; he was responsible, people were saying, and experienced.

In his own papers Joshua was holding off until such time as Langdon received the appointment. He could praise a *fait accompli* but he did not want to appear to have been instrumental in having brought it about, should anything go wrong. Not, he felt under the circumstances, that anything was likely to.

In using his influence, however, to get publicity for his man in media other than his own, he was right about

Tansy's value. She was so photogenic and had such a lovely figure that the Press was only too willing to present her to their readers. The Jamaican honeymoon had been photographed by Look, and when the couple appeared on the cover in their bathing suits the top brass of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Twentieth Century Fox, and Paramount looked with disfavour upon the talent in their stables. Where were a pair of torsos to equal those? Still, they took advantage of such material as they had, and during the summer Hollywood made a movie the culminating scene of which took place in a night club called The Larches, and Clark Gable as a handsome naval commander plunged back into a fiery furnace and emerged bearing in his arms a crippled man whom he laid at his wife's feet. He then proposed to Greer Garson and was accepted immediately. When Tansy and Langdon went to the world première of the picture they were cheered in the street as they stepped from Joshua's Rolls-Royce.

Despite her genuine aversion to publicity, Tansy was enjoying herself. She was radiantly happy in her marriage and in her imagination envisaged her husband not only as President but as a kind of King-Emperor. If Roosevelt had been elected four times, Langdon was due for life tenure. Even with this rosy future hovering before her, however, she stuck to her job. It gave her a feeling of solidity. Furthermore, publicity begat publicity and she landed several accounts she might not otherwise have obtained. Clients considered it piquant to be represented by a beautiful woman who was as well known as a movie star and intelligent to boot. In order to service the new business Tansy was obliged to take on another assistant, yet even in this bull market a native prudence restrained her from expanding

beyond her strictest requirements. What she liked was a neat little profit on books balanced weekly. Furthermore, although the stocks Joshua had recommended were going up, Langdon was holding them to profit by a long term gain and to a great extent they were living largely on what Tansy produced. This troubled her not at all and him to no great extent, for he had what he had mentioned to Joshua as his severance pay from Sally Henkel's estate to help him through the first year of marriage, and his prospects were excellent.

They had a festive summer and in early October Joshua announced that he felt that the time was ripe, that Langdon should hold himself in readiness: the office of the Secretary of the Interior would, he felt, shortly be opened to him.

The interview took place in the Wardman Park Hotel where Lawrence MacNamara lived with his wife in a small apartment. Mary MacNamara was on one of her periodic visits to a private hospital and the two men were alone at about nine o'clock of an autumn evening.

MacNamara, puzzled as to the reason for the call, was trying nevertheless to be hospitable, and offered his visitor a cigar. Jake Greenleaf refused. Brevity, he felt, was the soul of blackmail. When the job was distasteful, perform it and get out.

"It's good of you to see me, Mr. Secretary. I shall try not to take up much of your time."

"Not at all, Mr. Greenleaf. I've not had the pleasure of meeting you before but, as I am sure you know, your associate, Joshua Hutchinson, and I have met on more than one occasion."

"So I've heard. If you don't mind, I'll come straight to the point. I trust you won't think me presumptuous if I ask you what your plans are, but as Mr. Hutchinson no doubt explained to you, with our investments in natural resources we are always interested in any long range projects of the Department of the Interior."

MacNamara was mildly amused. So they were at it again. And this was apparently a less subtle customer than the big boss. "Well, Mr. Greenleaf," he said easily, "we're always happy to co-operate with the great companies such as Federal Coal and Uranium to the best of our ability, and our work is scarcely secret. But when you ask me what our plans are I don't quite know what you mean. Are you anticipating expansion that would require a Federal grant, or just what?"

"I don't mean that at all, Mr. MacNamara. I mean your personal plans. You as a man."

"I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about, sir," MacNamara said coldly—the question was unexpected and Greenleaf's attitude hostile—"I cannot see that my personal plans, as you call them, are any of your business."

"Sorry to offend you." Greenleaf's tone softened. "I was just wondering how long you intend to stay in office."

"How long I intend . . . ? I obviously intend to stay in office as long as the President asks me to, Mr. Greenleaf, which, from what he has said to me, I take it will be at least until his present term expires. Whether he will run again is, of course, his own decision and one on which the life of every Cabinet officer depends. This you know as well as I do. And now, if you'll excuse me . . . I have a good many papers I have to look through before going to bed." He rose, but his guest remained seated.

"You hadn't thought of retiring before your term expired, I take it," Greenleaf said affably.

"I had not."

"Ah. Too bad. It would have simplified matters."

"Mr. Greenleaf, I'm afraid I must ask you either to tell me what you're driving at or to leave this apartment."

"Very well, I'll explain." Jake's tone was still bland. "Mr. Hutchinson, as chairman of the board of Federal Coal and Uranium, and I as executive vice-president feel that another man would be better suited than are you, sir, to hold your position. Your training for the job, you will admit, has been sketchy. This is not to say you are to blame. Even an ex-Commissioner of Wild Life Conservation is scarcely equipped to deal with the vast natural resources of the country. Politics, as we know, often breed misfits. You're a good friend of the President's, it was natural he should want to reward the hard work you put in on the campaign with a plum position, but you, yourself, must surely have felt more than once that you're not the man for the job. For the good of the ccuntry . . ."

MacNamara's face was like thunder. "Mr. Greenleaf, you will leave my apartment at once. I do not know why you treat me with such insolence, but I must make it clear to you that I will no longer put up with it. Get out. Your age, sir, is the only thing that keeps you from being thrown out."

Mr. Greenleaf didn't stir. Far back in his brown eyes was a gleam of metal. He shook his head gently. "You don't voluntarily wish to render your country a service. Pity."

"I consider that I am rendering my country a service. I feel that I'm doing my job well, and the President, who is conceivably better equipped to judge than even you or Mr.

Hutchinson, seems to agree, so if you will go we can end this extremely unpleasant interview. I confess I'm at a loss to understand why you came here in the first place."

Greenleaf sat back and crossed his legs. "Mr. MacNamara, you are a married man, are you not?"

MacNamara looked blank. "I am. There's a picture of my wife there on the desk." Greenleaf studied it with interest. "Mmm. Pretty woman. You wouldn't want to cause her any unhappiness, I'm sure."

"May I ask why you bring my wife into this discussion?"

"I find women very interesting. I take it you do too." MacNamara, who was near the door, moved a step or two into the room. "What does that mean?"

"There is, I think, a woman here in Washington whom you find particularly interesting."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, but I think you do. I believe you know Mrs. Parsons, the wife of the Secretary of State?"

MacNamara was very still. "I know Mrs. Parsons," he said. "I know the wives of all the Cabinet members."

"To be sure, to be sure." Greenleaf permitted himself a wintry smile. "But hardly, I imagine, so intimately. So very, very intimately."

"Why, you son of a bitch." MacNamara crossed to the chair where Greenleaf sat and pulled him out of it by the lapels. "I don't care if you're old enough to be my father, get out before I kick you out."

Under the circumstances, Mr. Greenleaf still managed to retain a certain dignity. "I suggest, Mr. MacNamara, that you go to the President and resign within the coming week."

"I'll see you in hell before I resign. Why should I? Your filthy implications are so much moonshine."

"If you will release me I will prove to you they are not." MacNamara stared at him but he gradually released his hold on the older man's lapels. "One moment." Greenleaf reached down and lifted up the ubiquitous briefcase he had brought with him into the apartment. He took out a manila envelope and from it he drew a photograph. He presented it to MacNamara who looked at it and whose face turned grey. It was a picture of himself and Sheila Parsons seated in the big chair in her library in a close embrace. It had been taken the night he had told her of his interview with Hutchinson.

"Wh . . . where did you get this?"

"One of our dependable operators. We have others. Usually you've been very careful to draw the curtains, but there is this one too." He took another photograph from the envelope. It was the back of a man seated on a bed, naked from the waist up with a woman's arms around his neck, but her face was hidden.

"This is a damned outrage," MacNamara shouted. "You couldn't possibly prove who those two people are."

"No, but with the other one it makes pretty effective evidence. Also, there is this." He reached into the briefcase again and brought out a small roll of recording wire.

"What's that?"

"Neat, isn't it? The machine itself is unobtrusive. Slips into any little corner, under a bed, anywhere. This," and he tapped the roll, "happens to be a recording of a little dialogue between you and Mrs. Parsons. It was made in

her house when the Secretary of State was on one of his frequent trips to Europe in the service of his country. Would you care to hear it?"

MacNamara's mouth was dry but he managed a certain bravado. "How do I know the wire isn't blank?"

"It isn't, I assure you. If you will bear with me just a moment." He stooped down again. On the floor beside where the brief case had stood was a small covered box. Mr. Greenleaf took off the cover and revealed a recording machine. "Where is there a point?" Outraged but helpless, MacNamara pointed to an electric point beside the desk. Greenleaf crossed the room and plugged in the instrument. The spool started to unreal. Sheila's voice came first, a soft murmur of love, a whispered 'Oh, my darling, my life,' and then in a few moments a little cry. Then his own voice and a sound that was almost a moan.

MacNamara bounded across the room to snatch the spool from the machine, but with a surprisingly agile motion Greenleaf sprang in front of it. "Save yourself the effort, Mr. MacNamara. Even if you destroy this one we have taken it off on several records." He turned back the machine, clicked the reverse switch and watched the played-out wire spin back on to the spool. He then lifted it off and stuffed it into his pocket. "Now, do I make myself clear? You either resign at once or we break the story of your affair with Mrs. Parsons. This, as I am sure you realize, would be unfortunate not only for you and the lady, Mr. Parsons and your wife—I imagine such a shock would be damaging to her health, which I understand is already precarious—but also for the administration."

MacNamara looked at him with sunken eyes. "Why are you doing this?"

"I told you. We do not consider you to be the right man for the job."

"Your presumption, sir, is staggering. What right have you, as a private citizen, to assume the role of Government?"

"I'm sorry you feel that way," Jake Greenleaf said amiably, "but I don't speak merely as a private citizen. In that event, you would be quite right. What you must realize, however, is that, like General Motors and Dupont, with our employees and stockholders we represent several million people. Those people look to us for guidance and protection, Mr. MacNamara. They expect us to hold their interests secure. We would be doing them a great disservice if we condoned in an office as vital to those interests as that of the Secretary of the Interior a man whom we believed to be unfit. They have a right to expect ability. I may add they also expect scrupulous moral fibre in high office."

MacNamara looked at him in derision. "Why, you sanctimonious hypocritical son of a bitch, you don't care what my morals are, and you don't give a damn about your employees and stockholders, either—only in so much as they line your pockets. What *are* you after? You wouldn't be ambitious for my job for yourself, by any chance, I don't suppose?"

"No, Mr. MacNamara, I would not." Mr. Greenleaf gave a slight shudder. The suggestion was unexpected, and so foreign to his intentions that it threw him momentarily off balance. "I definitely would not. My motives, strange as it may seem, are disinterested."

Shaken, MacNamara turned from him and started to pace the room. Greenleaf waited a moment. "Come, come," he said, when the Secretary seemed unable to marshal his turbulent thoughts, "you're an intelligent man, MacNamara.

I don't think you want to ruin Mrs. Parsons' reputation. Judging from this conversation," and he patted his pocket with the tape in it, "you seem quite fond of her. You don't want to ruin her and involve the Secretary of State and your country in the peculiarly unsavoury scandal that would break once we release this to the Press. I suggest, also, you consult your own sense of self-preservation. I imagine you are aware of what the President's reaction to this information would be."

MacNamara spun on his heel. "The President might be very interested in hearing about this conversation, sir. He just might be as curious as I am as to what's *behind* this blackmail."

"I'm sorry that's the way you see an honest attempt to represent the best interests of those who are dependent on us," Greenleaf said, "but I fancy you will not go to the President. He would deplore your conduct on two counts. It would indicate a fallacy in his own judgement, and none of us likes to be shown up as a poor judge of human nature, and he is, as we both know, a strong family man, and I believe you and he are good friends. He trusts and respects you. The disillusionment would be cruel. In all probability he would view your behaviour in the same light as most simple, clean-living Americans would view it, and to them you would appear a very black villain indeed. A member of the Presidential Cabinet who should be above reproach betraying a colleague by seducing his wife. A colleague who is, furthermore, beloved and respected. Who, although advanced in years and not overly robust, is serving his country with distinction and honour."

"You'll excuse me while I retch," MacNamara said. "You can turn off the hearts and flowers."

Mr. Greenleaf sighed patiently. "Mrs. Parsons' role would not appear very sympathetic, either, that of a woman who steals another woman's husband while she, the wife, is ill and obliged to spend much time in the hospital."

MacNamara stared at him in bitter hatred. Finally he spoke. "Very well. What do you want?"

"Ah, that's better." Greenleaf's tone was almost cosy. "I should say the simplest, most forthright thing to do is to go to the President and tell him that grèatly as you regret the burden such action will place upon him, you must resign. He knows your wife is in failing health, and the Washington climate is notoriously poor. Raw in winter, hot and humid in summer. You feel you must get her away. I would suggest Arizona, some place of that sort might be beneficial."

MacNamara smiled sardonically. "I see. And what, may I ask, am I supposed to live on?"

"A man as well known as the Secretary of the Interior who has resigned for such an admirable reason—that of devotion to his ailing wife—will have no difficulty in finding plenty of positions open to him. As a matter of fact, if there's anything I can do to help tide you over . . ."

This was an aspect of the situation he and Joshua had not foreseen, but it occurred to Mr. Greenleaf that it might be a very tidy way of clinching the deal. They would make sure of their man on two counts, exposure and dependency.

Unfortunately for the symmetry of the scheme the idea occurred simultaneously to Lawrence MacNamara, who stared at his opponent with a kind of fascinated loathing. "There are really no depths to which you won't sink, are there? Blackmail me and buy me in the same breath! No, thank you, Mr. Greenleaf. And suppose I don't

go along with your little plot? Supposing I refuse to resign?"

Greenleaf shrugged. "It's up to you, of course, but I suggest you don't vacillate. Today is Tuesday. If by today week we do not read of your resignation, the photographs and the tape recording will be released to the Press."

There was a long pause. MacNamara walked heavily to the door of the apartment and turned with his hand on the door knob. "I'll get you for this if it's the last thing I ever do. That's a promise. Now you'd better go. Get out before I kill you."

"That, of course, is not a solution, Mr. MacNamara, although I can understand that the thought relieves your feelings. Goodbye. Remember, we shall be watching the papers with interest."

Mr. Greenleaf picked up his briefcase. He regretted leaving the recording machine, for his was a thrifty nature, but under the circumstances it seemed best.

Left alone, MacNamara dragged himself to the desk and sank into his chair. A long time later he leaned forward, his head on his arms, and his heavy frame shook with sobs.

The interview had taken place on Tuesday evening. The following Friday the Press carried the story that with the greatest regret the President had accepted the resignation of the very able Secretary of the Interior and would shortly announce his successor.

The resignation was a surprise, but the majority of citizens paid little attention. MacNamara had been as popular as any other Cabinet member, but mostly they were shadowy figures who did not register nearly as strongly in the

public consciousness as ball players and movie stars. National interest was focused on the meat shortage in America and the Nuremberg trials in Europe, and the general public felt small concern. When the rumours following MacNamara's resignation became actuality and Langdon Bishop was installed in the job most people were pleased. He was a popular figure, and his beautiful wife would infuse lustre into a rather humdrum office.

The very few who had known of or suspected the Parsons affair looked at each other with a slight jutting of the lower lip, a shrugging of shoulders. Too damned bad, they seemed to say, but probably the President had got an inkling of what was going on, had got the wind up and forced the issue. Pity to lose a good man over a purely private incident, but that was life. MacNamara himself was notably close-mouthed about the business and the matter, for the most part, was overridden by more cogent issues. One of the few who remembered it was Cass Hanophy.

About a week before she and Langdon were to move to Washington, Tansy gave a party and invited him. Cass was reluctant to go because by now his suspicion of Langdon had crystallized into active dislike, but he was curious to see how he would wear this new honour, and he was always eager to see Tansy.

Langdon, as a matter of fact, was at his best. Urbane, charming, forthright, and unassuming. He accepted congratulations with ingratiating modesty and assured one and all he would work without surcease to justify the President's belief in him.

It struck Cass as odd that Joshua should be missing from what was in effect a family victory party, but when he mentioned it to Nora she said that Joshua was out of town.

"Curiously enough," she added thoughtfully, "I got the impression he arranged his business trip deliberately so he wouldn't have to be here. I wonder why, because Tanse and Langdon are two of the people he has a genuine fondness for. Oh, well," she shrugged, "he never confides in me very much when it comes to business matters. I wish he'd be as self-contained about his extra-mural activities. He positively *flaunts* those." Cass touched his glass to hers and smiled encouragingly.

"A toast, a toast!" It was Dale Burgess, mildly tight. The party quieted a moment. "To the *wife* of the Secretary of the Interior who does so much to brighten the *exterior* of our land." Everyone laughed and drank.

"What do you really think about it?" Cass asked Nora. They were standing a little apart, as they had been at the cocktail party when Tansy and Langdon met.

"Oh, I've capitulated," Nora said. "Tansy's never been happier in her life, so it's all right with me. Deep inside, I still have faint reservations about Lang, but damn it, there's nothing I can put my finger on, and maybe I'm just a picayune old maid."

"It doesn't strike you as very strange that a man as able as Lawrence MacNamara, for no apparent reason, goes to the President and says, 'Boss, I want out from a job I'm doing well at, and that I need for the money as well as the prestige?' "

Nora hesitated. "Well, of course, I know very little, nothing really, about Mr. MacNamara. You think he was doing good work?"

"The best. And I'm pretty sure I'm right in saying he has no private income. He *needs* to work." He looked so concerned that Nora's interest was piqued. "Maybe there's

been dirty work at the crossroads," she said jokingly. "Why don't you probe? Be like one of those newspapermen in the whodunits who trigger investigations or whatever they do." Cass turned and looked at her. "I just might, at that," he said. "It's an idea." His thoughts reverted to the night Joshua had asked him his opinion of MacNamara. Deep in his consciousness something stirred. "I think perhaps I'll call upon our friend MacNamara, but first I'll have to locate him. He certainly took a powder when he resigned. There's never been anything in the papers beyond the bare fact that he was going."

"Didn't he say something about his own or his wife's health making it imperative?"

"Nonsense, he's a horse. His wife, I believe, is something of an invalid, but I don't imagine she's any worse than she's been all along. You may be right about the crossroads." He turned and looked thoughtfully at Langdon across the room.

Nine

ANY plans Cass may have formed for calling on his friend, MacNamara, were forcibly postponed as W.P.S. sent him abroad again, this time to Palestine to cover the Arab raids into that country and the growing violence throughout the area.

He was gone four months, and when he returned in late February of 1747 Langdon had been installed in office and Tansy was the popular mistress of a small house in Georgetown to which members of the Cabinet and Congress automatically gravitated. Any afternoon around cocktail time three or four Large Names were to be found sipping the Bishop bourbon and Scotch and appreciatively eyeing the hostess. It was even said that one or two of the guests were so besotted they unwittingly drank the tea Tansy always served in a staunch but losing effort to cut down their liquor bills.

Cass himself gravitated to the house for a weekend shortly after his return. He learned that Nora had come down from New York for a ten-day visit and Tansy had also asked Dale Burgess for a couple of parties. "And do you know, Cass," she said, her eyes shining with pleasure, "I think that dear little round man is rather smitten with Nora."

"My impression was that he was smitten with you," Cass said.

"Oh, nonsense. We're devoted to each other but there's nothing to it. I think, though, he really is beginning to go for

Nora. She likes him, too. Once you get to know him you forget that his appearance can seem a little comical and you like him enormously. He's a dear person and an awfully good architect. Gee, wouldn't that be great!"

"And what about Nora's burning romance with Mr. Hutchinson? You're not trying to break up that happy home, are you?"

"If it was happy I wouldn't dream of it, but we all know about it. Too well. Funny, though, for all he's such a pirate I miss not seeing old Josh. He's only been down here once and then it was all we could do to get him to stay over night. In a curious way, after helping Langdon so much, it's almost as if he didn't want to have anything more to do with him."

Cass pricked up his ears. He had suspected all along that Hutchinson had been far more influential in getting Langdon into office than appeared on the surface, but if this were so, why did he now appear to ditch him?

"Have Langdon and Josh had any kind of row?" he asked.

"Good Lord, no. Langdon's crazy about Josh. He's the big benefactor. He's been wonderful to us. I guess I didn't tell you about it but he made Langdon a long term loan so he could buy stock which in the end, after repayments and capital gains tax and all the things that have to be done, should net us a tidy little sun. And he just did it out of sheer niceness because he likes Lang and wanted to put him on to a good thing."

"Did he now," Cass said. This was indeed interesting. Mr. Hutchinson had made a sizeable loan. To do this he must have liked and trusted Bishop, yet once his good friend, whom he used to see so frequently, was installed in

office he made himself scarce, and his papers, which in the normal way might have been expected to campaign for his nomination to the Secretaryship, or at the very least to have praised the President's choice, had been notably circumspect in their comments. The old ties were severed, and seemingly no connection existed between the Secretary and the financier. Mr. Hutchinson apparently wished to give the impression that he barely knew Bishop. Why? Cass wondered.

He said nothing to Tansy, but made up his mind that this time nothing should prevent him from going to MacNamara. He was still troubled by an able, healthy man resigning his position. His reporter's nose twitched ever so slightly at a faint but familiar smell, the aroma arising from bamboozlement of the public.

No such thoughts, however, disturbed his beautiful friend. Tansy was radiant over her husband's success, the only cloud in her sky the unaccountable coldness of Josh. She spoke of him again in another context. "I suppose it's true of everybody, but Josh really is one of the people you have to love, warts and all." Cass smiled. "Have his defects been more heinous than usual?"

"More, but the same, alas. Apparently he's got some new affair going, and Nora's heard about it, and she's miserable. Honestly, why do people have to go out of their way to carry bad news? Did you ever hear of a little specimen called Clover Delaney?"

"Can't say I have, but maybe I should get to know her. A Hanophy and a Delaney, we're a cinch to get on. Who is she?"

"Nora and I think she's one of Josh's girls, in fact we know she *has* been, and that Josh must have ditched her or

something, and she's mad, because you know what she did?"

Cass shook his head. He found Mr. Hutchinson's sex life less fascinating than his political machinations, but apparently he wasn't to get the lowdown on one without the other.

"Well," Tansy went on, and although her tone was disapproving Cass could see she was enjoying herself, "Nora only found out about it later when Clover told her, but last November Joshua went down to Crossways for about two weeks. He told Nora he wasn't taking her because it was to be a stag party, shooting and all, but, of course, stallion that he is, that wasn't true. He took Clover and a couple of other girls and, as you may imagine, it was scarcely the outing of a French convent, *but*, and this is the part Nora and I have doped out between us, although there she was, ready, willing, and able, Josh must have spurned Clover because he sent her and the other girls home after a few days and Clover went to see Nora—in some way she knew about her and had her phone number and called her up—and told her that she was being given the run around, not by her, Clover, mark you, but by some southern belle who lives down there in Thomasville and who's been to see Joshua at Crossways several times."

Cass burst out laughing. "My God, I never heard such a nonstop marathon sentence in my life. Women kill me."

"But aren't you sorry for Nora?"

"Not a bit of it. If she were really miserable she'd stop hitting her head with the hammer, she'd leave Josh. But she'd be bored. As it is, she never has a dull moment."

"I think you're a pig."

"Nonsense, you know I'm right."

"But isn't Josh awful?"

"He wouldn't be so awful if women didn't acquiesce."

"That's not fair. Women can't help themselves. Men like Josh put on pressure."

He eyed her sceptically. "He ever put any on you?"

"If you want to know, he did. He does it automatically, but I was able to resist because I've known him all my life. Even if I'd wanted to, which I didn't, it would have seemed, well, kind of incestuous. My dead stepfather's cousin! I couldn't have."

"I suppose most poor defenceless women find it impossible to say no to the pressure of all that gold."

Tansy's old Buddha laugh boomed out. "You know, that's where they get had. Josh is not very generous. I will admit he's pretty good about Nora, the set-up's different, but he's awfully coony. He's told me himself he prefers affairs with married women because they have to consider their husbands and can't keep after him too violently. Also, he isn't obliged to give them anything costly because it would make their husbands suspicious. He gives them little charms for their bracelets, things like that, but no emeralds or minks."

"You know, dear," Cass said, "the more you tell me about your pal Hutchinson the less lovable he seems to be. What is there about him that gets you wenches?"

"His power," Tansy said promptly. "Even more than the money itself it's the ability to make it. It's a rugged world. Josh is one of the men who have licked it and come out on top. You might not understand about that but to a woman it's very sexy."

"I see. Well, I suppose we all take our pleasures differently." There was a slight pause.

"I don't mean this to sound rude or a *non sequitur*," Tansy said, "but how's your wife?"

"Laurie's very well. She and little Cass are in New York, you know."

"No, I didn't know."

"She moved east while I was in Palestine and managed to get an apartment."

"Do you live there too?"

"Yes, I do, but it's scarcely a honeymoon cottage if that's what's bothering you."

"It doesn't bother me in the slightest, my Cleveland friend."

Cass laughed. "That's good, because it doesn't bother me either. My life is on a very even keel."

"Have you got a girl?"

"I have."

"Anyone I know?"

"I doubt it."

"Is she nice?"

"Extremely."

"Good. I wish you well. It's much better for your health this way."

"You should know."

"Cass?"

"My dear?"

"Fundamentally you don't like Langdon, do you?"

He considered for a few moments in silence, then he said, "There's something about him I don't understand. My feeling is that if I did understand it I would be against it."

"But why? He's a wonderful man in many ways."

"I think that's right. He has physical beauty, courage,

the ability to make you happy. Do you have his confidence, do you think?"

"You mean business affairs, things like that?"

"More or less, yes."

It was Tansy's turn to be thoughtful. "More or less, I would say, yes. If there's anything he doesn't tell me I imagine it's because it's confidential. I wouldn't want him to. And if he did tell me I would certainly never tell anyone else what it was."

Cass smiled. "You would be quite right. Especially a newspaperman."

It took Cass two or three days to locate Lawrence MacNamara, for he had dropped from sight with notable thoroughness, but Cass discovered that he was working Syracuse, New York, with the Redman-Burling Corporation. He telephoned for an appointment and went up there to interview him. MacNamara at first was difficult to draw. He was suspicious and diffident and had obviously been badly burned. Cass sensed that he wanted to tell his story, but was at the same time reluctant to expose himself to criticism and condemnation. He might also be holding back because of fear. He was, however, touched that after several months anyone cared enough about him to want to find out what had happened and why he had left a post he was filling so admirably.

It was Cass, finally, who broached circumspectly and with as much tact as he could muster, the topic of the love affair, since he sensed that there must lie the key to the whole puzzling business. It took a little time, but once MacNamara knew that he was aware of it and

accepted it without censor he thawed and began to speak freely.

He told Cass about his interview with Jake Greenleaf and his own subsequent interview with the President, who had urged him to stay but who seemed to accept at face value his contrived excuse about his wife's health. MacNamara gave a short laugh. "There was bitter irony with a vengeance. I pretty much had to use the excuse that bastard Greenleaf suggested, as there wasn't any other conceivable reason for my going. I thought the Chief looked sceptical for one moment when I mentioned Mary, but he either believed me or thought it politic to pretend he did. Possibly he'd heard a breath about Sheila and me, I don't know. I flatter myself that he's missed me, and that if he *did* know anything he may have thought my resignation was a graceful way out."

Cass tapped a tooth with the end of the pencil with which he was taking notes. "Have you never been curious about your successor?"

"Langdon Bishop? Sure, but he's only been in a few months. As far as I can gather he's made no boners."

"I don't know that he has," Cass agreed, "but he may. It's not in the cards that anybody pulls the stunt Hutchinson did doesn't do it for a purpose."

"The blackmail, you mean? But it was Greenleaf."

"Don't kid yourself. It was Hutchinson."

MacNamara looked thoughtful "Hutchinson. He's the boss, of course, but why in the name of God . . .?"

"Did you never know that he and Bishop were close friends?"

"No. No, that I didn't. I've never heard of them being linked."

"And now," Cass said drily, "you're not likely to, but a little less than a year ago they were very buddy-buddy. As far as Hutchinson was concerned Lang was a *wunder-kind*. Nothing was too good for our boy. He set him up financially. It follows naturally enough that he set him up politically."

MacNamara stared. "You mean he forced me out to make way for him?"

"That's my guess."

"By God," MacNamara shouted, and the shout brought him to his feet. "That's it! He was always after me, the snivelling fraud, with 'What are my plans?' and 'Couldn't we do this?' and 'Maybe the other could be arranged' and 'Were I to see my way clear'. . . Nothing so crass as money, mark you, was ever mentioned, but the smell of it permeated the air. More than once I gathered that were I to turn aside my eyes ever so slightly I'd find the exercise highly profitable. I never really knew what the son of a bitch wanted because I never gave him the time of day long enough to find out, but it dovetails, boy, it dovetails. Me out, Bishop in, he's got a Secretary fits his hand sweet as a sun-ripe peach. Mother of God, when the President hears of this!"

Though prone to agree with him, Cass felt obliged to put on the brakes. "I'd be for getting to the President if we had any dope," he said, "but suspicion's not enough."

MacNamara looked at him in astonishment. "You'd wait until something explodes?"

"I think we're in a stronger position if we can show actual malfeasance, or at least the attempt to commit same. Also, don't forget it's quite possible that Bishop is a dupe. I don't *think* he is, but I doubt he's in Hutchinson's league,

either, and they may have hoodwinked him. What I'd like to figure out is what old Josh is after, and if he's going about getting it legally or illegally."

MacNamara looked thoughtful. "One of the few specific items I remember him bringing up in our conversational brushes was northwest timber. He seemed interested in the possibility of renting certain tracts from us."

"Would that be legal?"

"Oh yes. With his newspapers, not to mention his other multiple interests, forests are important to him. Normally he could arrange a perfectly straightforward deal, though he'd have to be responsible, of course, for replanting and for Government approved conservation practices."

"Then off-hand there'd be no reason for the drastic action he took if he was merely going in for arboriculture?"

"Not that I can see."

"Hmmm." Cass doodled abstractedly on his note pad. MacNamara stared out the window. "Of course," he said after a moment, "there's always what's under the earth—and that wouldn't be part of the lease."

Cass looked up. "Oh? You mean mineral deposits?"

"Deposits of uranium that may not yet have been explored or even discovered—ores that haven't been thoroughly analysed. . . ."

"Did he ever speak to you about those?"

"As I recall, no."

"No. He wouldn't, of course. It would be too obvious, but they could be the source of enormous wealth, could they not?"

"They could. And the interesting thing is that the dividing line between Government and private ownership has not been clearly defined. As of now, leases, outright

sales, all negotiations are at a standstill until some decision is reached as to how the deposits will be worked, and who gets what."

Cass had caught his scent at last and followed it with the eager concentration of a bird dog. "So that if in the interim a private company *could* get access to the mines or veins or whatever the technical term is . . ."

MacNamara broke in. "Especially if they extend down from Canada so that the source would be out of our jurisdiction, and the rights to our part not yet assigned . . ."

"And if the Secretary of the Interior just didn't happen to be aware of certain activities of private companies initiating priority claims . . ."

"That's it. That's it!" MacNamara's tone was a shout of triumph. "A very sweet deal could be consummated, and it might be hard to establish to what extent the Secretary was actually guilty of malfeasance. Our friends have thought of that, never fear. Furthermore, I have a shrewd idea they count on the complex ramifications of companies involved to cause an investigation to flounder, or at the very least get sidetracked in a maze of legal obfuscation that might take years to unravel. But God almighty, boy, what an opportunity to break a lance! A white steed prancing, the forces of virtue pitted against those hell-devils, and they getting their come-uppance in the end. If I had the money and the time to get out to the northwest and the ability to fire an investigation I bet you I'd uncover a stench to knock the American public on it's well-upholstered arse." There was almost a sob in his voice. "I'm powerless, boy. I can't do it, but what are *you* waiting for?"

"I'm on my feet," Cass said, and he was. "I'll go to W.P.S. I'll tell them I've got a story to burn their ears off.

I'll be in the northwest in twenty-four hours. Where shall I go first? Washington? Oregon? Whom shall I see? That's where you *can* do something."

"Let me think a moment. Let me think." MacNamara might almost have been the son of the man Cass saw when he first came in. He was alight with enthusiasm. Revenge might not be noble, Cass reflected, but sweet it certainly was and, under the circumstances, understandable.

MacNamara brought up one or two names which he then discarded, but gradually he worked out for Cass a condensed itinerary of places he thought he should go, and suggested men for him to get in touch with. "Mark you, I'm not sure how much you'll learn nor, indeed, how much they may be willing to tell you, but if there is any skulduggery afoot they're the ones should know about it. And so, by God, should the American public. Glib as you please, Hutchinson would defraud them of their own property."

"Of course," Cass said, cautious now that they seemed actually on the right scent, "we're not sure . . ."

"Sure we're sure, my boy. The set-up's crystalline. All we have to do is to pin them." Suddenly he chuckled. "It's a bit like pinning an octopus, I grant you, but if Hutchinson, Bishop, and Company aren't in the cookie jar up to their armpits, I'll eat it."

Cass laughed at the garbled metaphor but in a moment he sobered. "I agree with you, but God, how I wish none of this had ever happened."

"Don't we all! Integrity's lovely virtue. Like truth it makes you free, and usually it makes you happier."

"It wasn't even the integrity I meant," Cass said honestly. He was thinking of Tansy. "This is going to be a

bitter blow to . . . to someone I like very much." MacNamara looked at him shrewdly. "A woman, I take it?" The younger man nodded. "Mrs. Bishop. It'll be hard for her."

"Would you rather not make the investigation?"

"It isn't a question of that," Cass said. "The complication exists, but obviously I'll do the job. Who knows? Maybe by some wonderful fluke I'll find out we're wrong."

MacNamara, as Cass expected, didn't think the remark worthy of comment.

"May I ask you something?" he said after a moment. "It's personal but I have a reason." MacNamara nodded. "Go ahead."

"Are you and Mrs. Parsons still in love?"

MacNamara looked at him for a moment and then turned and gazed out the window at the pale spring sky. "You mean does it last through thick and thin? Yes, it does. In our case the price has been high, but we believe it's worth it. It's got to be worth it. The hellish part now is that we can't even see each other. We write, of course, but it's a weary time. We wait and pray that whether or not the President gets in again Mr. Parsons will want to resign at the end of this term. If he does, we feel there'll be a chance for a divorce. Love is worth almost anything. It's up to each individual to discover the price it isn't worth." He turned back to his companion. "You, I think, will not stifle an exposure that should be made for the public's good if you find what you anticipate finding. If you do, through being emotionally involved with someone, eventually, I'm afraid, you'll regret it."

"Believe me, if we're right, there's nothing I'll hide,"

Cass said, and he meant it. Concerned as he was about Tansy his reporter's instinct was too strong to be denied. He was beginning to get the sense of mounting excitement he always experienced when a new story was in the making. "Do you regret your resignation?" he asked MacNamara.

"In my case, I had no choice, and so, do you know, I have no regrets. Regret's a wasting emotion, Cass. Eschew it."

Cass grinned. "That," he said firmly, "is the very thing I'm going to do."

Despite his brave words, however, he felt confused in his relationship with Tansy. All through MacNamara's recital of the scene with Greenleaf it had been Tansy who had haunted him. Did she know anything, did her husband know anything of the way the Secretaryship had been laid open to him? Cass doubted that Bishop could have instigated the action, but had he, in part, condoned it? That Tansy would know about it and be able to hide her knowledge seemed unlikely. She was far too honest, they were far too good friends for her to pretend ignorance to him, even though she might have feigned it to others.

In a way, Cass hoped she did know—the shock would have been great, but it would be behind her. She could have adjusted herself to living with a *fait accompli*, however shabby, over which she had no control, and if Langdon was doing his work well the action might be exonerated.

Cass hesitated, undecided as to the best course of action, but he finally determined to sound her out, indeed to tell her what had happened, if she didn't know. He would tell her about the blackmail, it would put her on her guard against Hutchinson. If Joshua was capable of doing what he had to MacNamara the fact that he had known Tansy since

childhood would be no deterrent to his turning on Langdon should he ever be so minded. The fraudulent activities suspected by Cass himself and MacNamara he would not mention to her. After all, he had no proof, and one blow was enough.

The day after his meeting in Syracuse he telephoned her. He scarcely liked to invite himself back to Georgetown to expose a man behind his back in his own house, but his need to talk to her was urgent.

Fortunately, she told him she would be coming to New York in a couple of days' time. Her publicity office was continuing under the able management of Riva Smith, and every week or so she flew into town for a couple of days to discuss business and meet with possible new clients.

Cass, asking to see her, suggested they meet at the Gotham where she was staying. She and Langdon had given up their new apartment when they moved to Washington, but in her small suite they would be insured privacy.

Tansy got back to the hotel from her office at six o'clock. Cass had said he would be there by six-fifteen. She brushed her hair and freshened her make-up, but when he arrived she still wore her soft black wool suit and white blouse. Her dark hair curled about her ears, and when Cass saw her he thought she looked young and defenceless. His self-imposed mission was not an easy one. He had a momentary qualm as to whether it was even necessary or right, yet if there were as many ramifications to the deal as he suspected, the scandal was sure to be uncovered, and better *she* should be prepared for it by him than have it explode in her face.

He refused her offer of a drink and inquired politely after Langdon's health. She said he was well and was sorry

that he hadn't been able to come to New York with her, he would miss seeing Cass.

With the amenities out of the way Cass came straight to the point. "Tanse, did you never think it strange that Lawrence MacNamara resigned when he did?"

"Why, I don't know," she said. "I really knew nothing about him. I don't think most people do know about Cabinet members. Was he particularly good?"

"He was excellent, and at the time it happened I thought there was something peculiar about it."

"Oh, wait a minute, now that you mention it I think Langdon did tell me something. What was it? Oh, yes, that Mr. MacNamara was resigning for personal reasons."

Cass sat forward in his chair. "Have you any recollection of what they were?"

"Not the foggiest, I'm afraid. I don't think Lang said."

"You don't remember any gossip about a love affair involving the Secretary?"

"Good heavens, no. A Cabinet member? I always think of them as rather pokey and proper."

"Well, they're not," Cass said. "They're human beings and things happen to them. Something happened to poor MacNamara with a vengeance."

"Really?" Tansy said. "What?" But her tone was almost indifferent. Because she loved Langdon and was proud of him she had wanted him to have the office his heart was set on and she felt that since he had been installed he had been doing an admirable job, yet she could not forget that at the time he had told her of his ambition she had been a little surprised at the idea of MacNamara's leaving the post. It was another of the instances where Langdon had seemed evasive.

She sat watching Cass, her expression guarded. She was not sure she wanted to hear his story. He hesitated a moment but decided that the direct approach was best. "Tansy," he said, "MacNamara was blackmailed out of his job so that Langdon could have it."

"What do you mean?" she asked, but she was very still.

"Just that. You never heard about it?"

"Of course not. I don't believe it. It's patently impossible. What do you mean, blackmail?"

"What I say. They had something on MacNamara and they let him have it."

"Who had something on him? What did they have?" Shocked, she sounded angry, but her ignorance, he knew, was genuine.

"Josh and Greenleaf. Possibly Langdon. That's what I don't know. They had proof of an affair MacNamara was having with the wife of the Secretary of State and they told him, and in a particularly brutal way, that if he didn't get out they'd spill it to the Press. It would have been a screaming scandal, so he had no choice but to go." Tansy felt sick but her rebuttal was automatic. "I don't believe it. Josh wouldn't do . . ." She stopped. In her heart she suspected there was very little Josh wouldn't do when power was in the balance, but of Langdon she was sure. "You've been misinformed, Cass. You misunderstood what you were told."

"No, Tansy, there was no chance of that. I got the story straight." And he told her of his meeting with MacNamara and all that the latter had said of his grim interview with Greenleaf.

Tansy got up and walked around the room. She held

her side as though in pain. "But that . . . that can't be true. That's an appalling thing to do to a person." And then, clutching at a straw, "Maybe Mr. MacNamara had done a bad thing . . . I don't mean the affair, something dishonest in office, and had to get out, and he told you that story as a cover-up."

"Tansy, I know MacNamara. I've known him for years. He's an honest guy. And if, for the sake of your argument, he *had* done something, which I know he didn't, it's inconceivable he could trump up such a story . . . implicating Mrs. Parsons in that way . . . that's wild, you know it is."

She looked at him with stricken eyes and nodded. "Yes," she said, and her voice was almost a whisper. "Yes, I suppose it is." She paced again up and down the little room. "But Langdon doesn't know anything about it," and now she was vehement. "Joshua and Greenleaf may have done this rotten thing for his sake, but he's innocent. Here, just to show you how straight he is, he's even against my continuing with my job. We've had several arguments about it because he thinks maybe it doesn't look well, the wife of the Secretary of the Interior involved in publicity. If I got some big firm as an account that had even a remote connection with his department he says people might talk. They might say that because of me he was showing special favour. So far, I've been able to persuade him that I should stick with my old clients, but I've had to promise that if I get any new ones that might be complicated, from his point of view, I mean, that I'll discuss them with him before signing any contracts. That's how scrupulous he is. With that kind of a man to deal with, how could you think . . .? How could you imply . . .?" She stopped.

She had been talking rapidly, excitedly, and Cass had a curious feeling she was trying to convince herself as well as him.

"Look, Tansy," he said, "I'm sure Langdon would be correct in any overt situation, such as your work, for instance, that kind of thing, but what worries me is that he may be heading for a fall he doesn't know about."

Keyed up as she was her patience snapped. "Oh, please, Cass. Don't tell me you've come here with this frightful story just out of the kindness of your heart! Don't pretend to me. You know about Joshua and you know about Jake Greenleaf and you suspect my husband's tarred with the same brush, don't you?"

"Good God, Tansy, how can I tell? I hesitated to come, believe me I did. I didn't know what I'd say to you. I didn't know how you'd take it, but we're old friends and I wanted to warn you. I tell you this is a dangerous situation. Men don't behave the way Josh and Greenleaf did just to pass the time of day. Now that they've got Langdon in the post they want something from him. It's hard for me to believe he's not aware of that, but if he isn't he should be warned. You both should."

"Thank you, but I don't see that what Langdon does or doesn't do is any of your business."

"It is my business. It's everybody's business if the Secretary of the Interior is dishonest."

She was now thoroughly angry. "I resent that, Cass. I don't think there is anything the least untoward in the situation, but supposing there were—you can't concede that Langdon might in honesty be ignorant of that fact, can you? Oh, no, he has to be guilty of the most shameful kind of duplicity."

"I don't say that, but I do say your husband's no fool."

"My God, how you hate him."

"No, I don't, believe me, I don't. I've been jealous of his having you, yes. When I first got home, if I'd been free, I think I'd have asked you to marry me."

"Do you indeed! How very kind." Her tone was scathing but he went doggedly on. "You might have turned me down, of course, and the fact that I couldn't ask you was my own fault, I admit that, but it rankled just the same, your falling in love with him, but that isn't why I've come to you with this story. I swear it isn't."

She had to believe him and the anger began to drain out of her. "What do you suggest I do?"

"In the first place, I think you should tell Langdon the truth of what happened. It's too late to change it—Mac-Namara can't go back, and if Langdon's doing well in the job he deserves to keep it, especially if he's innocent of the way it was obtained, but he certainly ought to know what happened, and he ought to be put on his guard against Joshua."

"You're asking a lot, Cass. In effect, you're asking him to break with a man who's become a close friend, a man to whom he's indebted for more money, or potentially more money, than he's ever had before, not to mention his job, regardless of how he got it."

"Tansy, is there any question in your mind of what's the right thing to do?"

"Yes. Yes, there is. It's not as cut and dried as you make out. I've learned a lot recently of how the world wags. Sometimes, perforce, one compromises." He thought she meant that Langdon might compromise between his conscience and his ambition, but she meant it for herself.

There were elements in her relationship with her husband that made her afraid of a show-down. She turned on Cass between anger and tears. "*Why* did you have to find this out? Why in God's name couldn't you have let well enough alone?"

"Tanse, it was my job."

"Your job! The Press! Who are you little men to set yourselves up as the nation's conscience? Pry and poke and ferret around in everybody's business. What's done's done. It was deplorable, of course, but what can *I* do to straighten it out? And if I do tell Langdon, and if I do warn him, am I not doing my best to undermine his confidence? How can he do a job harassed by the knowledge of an act he can do nothing to change? You newspapermen! You and your zeal! You're like a missionary rushing the knowledge of his personal brand of good and evil to the heathen and destroying forever their innocence and happiness, only you do it in the name of freedom of the Press instead of God. Do you plan to smear this over every paper in the country, by the way? You haven't said."

"Tansy, pull yourself together. I don't plan to publish this blackmail story, no. I don't give a damn about Joshua and Greenleaf—they deserve to be exposed—but I do give a damn, a big one, about MacNamara. And you. If Langdon's involved, you're hurt. I am suspicious, yes, suspicious as hell of the reason *behind* the blackmail, but I promise you I'm not going to borrow trouble. I don't plan to 'smear' anything over the papers unless I have proof positive of chicanery and double dealing, which, at the moment, I haven't."

"But you'll get it, never fear," Tansy cried. "A real scoop! Cass Hanophy, boy reporter, comes through!"

Her eyes were blazing with scorn, her voice was bitter. Cass looked at her a moment. He opened his mouth and shut it with a snap. Then he picked up his hat. "Coming here this evening to tell you this is the toughest thing I've ever done, but whether you believe it or not I did it out of friendship and devotion. If I can ever help you I will, but I think now I'd better go."

"I think perhaps you had. All your friendship seems to bring me is hurt and dismay."

"Oh, Tanse."

"I've always wanted to talk to you—you've always been a help—but I can't stand any more just now. I'm sorry."

At the door he turned. "When are you going back to Washington?"

"I don't know. Tomorrow, I guess. I'm supposed to see two new clients in the morning. Maybe they'll be people whom Langdon will think I shouldn't accept. That's all I'll need for this to have been the perfect trip."

"Goodbye, Tansy."

"Goodbye, Cass. We seem to have a thousand farewells, you and I. Thanks for the good intentions, anyway."

He went out and closed the door behind him. Tansy walked up and down the small sitting room for a long time, trying desperately to think what to do. Much as she dreaded it she would have to talk to Langdon. Regardless of what she had said to Cass about not undermining his confidence, she knew she could not possibly go on living with her husband, ignoring her knowledge of the situation. They would discuss it when she saw him.

The next day her business took her longer than she had

anticipated, so that it was nearly ten o'clock in the evening when she got back to Washington.

Langdon, who had been at a business dinner and was just getting home, saw her arrive with astonishment, for she had planned to be in New York at least two days longer. "Darling," he asked, "what happened? It's wonderful you're back, but I didn't think I could count on you before Friday. Everything all right at the office?"

"At the office?" She looked vague; the office seemed far away. "Oh, yes, everything's fine. Langdon, come in here. Come into the sitting room. I've got to talk to you."

He followed her in from the little hallway, watching her uneasily. A small warning flag went up in his consciousness. "Is anything the matter?"

"That's what I've got to ask *you*. Oh, Lang, what is it? What happened?"

"What happened when? What are you talking about?"

"Sit down." He sat on the decorative, not overly comfortable Victorian sofa that was part of the furniture of their rented house, and she sat opposite him. "I don't know any other way to say this except straight out. I saw Cass in New York."

Suspicious, suddenly, of what she might have discovered, Langdon sought to divert her concentration by a swift attack. "Just why do you go to New York, Tansy? Is it for business as you say, or is it really to see Cass?"

"Oh, Langdon, don't. What specious, silly talk. You know quite well I go for business, but Cass called up and asked to see me."

"What did he want?"

"Well, he had a rather curious story." When she had been in New York she had been certain of Langdon's

innocence or ignorance of the situation. Now, somehow, face to face with him she was unsure. Cass's words had the ring of truth. She continued haltingly. "I think . . . I know you're doing a wonderful job, Lang, in your department, but I think I'm right in saying, am I not, that Lawrence MacNamara had a good reputation when you took over from him? I mean . . . it was my impression that you thought so yourself."

Langdon looked at once relieved and somewhat irked. "I had nothing against the man personally one way or the other," he said, "but as I think I told you at the time, according to Josh he had private reasons for resigning. What they were I have no idea."

Tansy watched him closely. "You weren't instrumental in any way in getting him out of office were you?"

"I? How could I have been?"

"Ah!" It was a small sound of triumph. "I knew it! I knew you couldn't have done it. And you didn't know, you hadn't heard anything about an affair he was having with Mrs. Parsons?"

"Ben Parsons' wife?"

"Yes."

Langdon hesitated. "Where did you get that from? Cass?"

"Yes. I know he doesn't want it talked about indiscriminately, but the story he told me was an ugly one. According to him, and all I know, of course, is what he told me, but according to him MacNamara didn't resign on his own at all, but, on account of the affair, was forced out by blackmail."

"Who's supposed to have done it?"

"Oh, Lang, that's the frightful part. Jake Greenleaf did

it actually, but, of course, it was at Joshua's instigation. Oh, my dear . . . you didn't know anything about it, did you?"

"Well, I'd heard rumours, occasional bits of gossip—that kind of thing gets around, you know—but I didn't go to MacNamara and blackmail him, if that's what you mean."

"And you hadn't any idea of what Josh and Greenleaf intended doing, had you? I mean . . . I mean, they didn't tell you that that was the issue on which they were going to force his hand in order to get you in?"

"No, they did not." Langdon's tone was short.

"What he did may have been wrong and immoral, although Lord knows you and I are no ones to talk, and apparently they were terribly in love, but to force him to resign for a personal reason when he was doing a good job seems so brutal, somehow."

"I still can't see what you're in such a stew about. If MacNamara gets himself into a hell of a mess and the President gets wind of it and asks him to get out, that's not my fault, is it?"

"But that's not the story Cass told me. According to him . . ."

"Tanse, for God's sake why should this old beau of yours, this old lover, for all I know, come poking his nose into my business, and why the hell should you believe him against what I tell you?"

She looked at him steadily. "Cass was never my lover and you know it. When we were young we thought we were going to be married. It didn't work out. But he's honest and he's my friend, and he'd be your friend too if you'd let him. I get angry with him, but we can trust him.

The reason he told me the story was as a warning. The very fact that Joshua went to such lengths to get you into office Cass suspects means that he wants something from you, expects it, and you should be on your guard that he doesn't place you in a position where unwittingly you might do something you shouldn't, where he'd have something on you."

Langdon looked at her and his expression was derisory. "It's very kind of you and your friend to be so concerned about me, but it doesn't seem to occur to you that my job and my behaviour are none of his goddamned business. I'm perfectly able to take care of myself."

"Oh, darling, of course you are. You're strong and good. It's simply that a man in Joshua's position can be terribly devious. Cass . . ." she caught herself, "I mean Josh must have been *terribly* anxious for you to become Secretary of the Interior if he'd put that kind of pressure on a man to get him out and you in."

Langdon gave a short laugh. "Well, thanks. You're highly complimentary, I must say. You sound as though getting me in were scraping the bottom of the barrel."

"How can you say such a thing? You know I think you're brilliant in the job. But to blackmail a person . . ."

"For God's sake, will you stop harping on that! Suppose Josh did bring a little pressure to bear? I heard about the affair, I was sorry for the guy, but he was vulnerable, what could he expect? You can't be in his position and be playing dirty pool."

"I suppose not, but a love affair . . . that doesn't affect the voters, it's personal."

"Personal or not he got it in the neck and I profited by it. Now it's up to me to make good, and I think I'm doing

it. As a matter of fact, the President does too. Only yesterday afternoon I saw him and he congratulated me on the way things were going." Actually it had been the Press Secretary who had dropped a kind word, but the President had smiled and shaken hands with him at a small White House reception so there seemed no harm in attributing the compliment to him. "And another thing," Langdon went on, "you may not feel a sense of loyalty to your old friends, but I do. It's quite true that it's largely due to Josh's influence that I got this job, and I intend to retain his friendship. Don't forget that we'll have a lot of money one day and we owe that to him, too. I know which side our bread is buttered on if you don't."

Tansy got up and walked away from him. He watched her for a moment and his manner softened. "Honey, I'm sorry if I sound tough, but all this Government business is complicated at best and at times it gets pretty involved. Let's you and I not have any difficulties between us. I need you, truly I do." He went and stood behind her and put his arms around her and kissed her hair. She turned close against him. "Oh, Lang, I love you so, but I can't bear it if everything isn't completely honest and *safe* for you."

"It will be, darling," he assured her, "and that's where you can help."

"I'll do anything I can. Always. You know that."

"Good. By the way, you like Hysander, don't you?"

She drew away a little so she could look at him. "That chap who's the head of land management in your department?"

"That's the one. He's an able man and he can be a big help to me."

"Well," she said, "I have nothing against him, but the

last couple of times I've seen him—I mean at parties when you've been talking to other people—I think he's been rather foolish."

"How, foolish?"

"Well, he's rather made a pass at me and asked if he couldn't see me alone sometime." Langdon stepped away from her and took a cigarette from a box on a small nearby table. "And what did you say?"

"Naturally, I said no. I didn't want to offend him or sound prudish so I didn't say, 'Sir, I'm a married woman,' which was what I was thinking, and that he shouldn't ask such things, but I did say I was very busy and that you were, too, and that such free time as we had we liked to spend together."

To her amazement Langdon seemed annoyed. "I'm rather sorry you put it just that way," he said. "Dennig Hysander's important to me. You might try to cultivate him a little."

"What do you mean, cultivate?" She was genuinely puzzled.

"Be nice to him, for God's sake."

"Nice? How nice?"

"Do I have to tell you? You're a woman and men find you attractive. Have lunch with him if he asks you, or invite him for a drink some afternoon."

"You mean alone?"

"Why not?"

She was staring at him, her eyes very wide. "You wouldn't mind?"

"Why should I mind? He's a good chap and you're a big girl now, able to take care of yourself. Look, Tanse, I'm doing a job and I need all the help I can get. There are

certain aspects of my work that Joshua's interested in, some reports and so on that he wants from my department. Hysander can be helpful in obtaining them. You keep telling me all the time there's nothing you wouldn't do for me. Well, all right, here's your chance. Dennig likes you. Don't be so damned stand-offish."

Tansy stared at him. She felt as though the blood were slowly draining out of her heart, that she couldn't be hearing him correctly. She remembered the first night they had been lovers, the passion and sweetness and the gaiety. He had said that she was his, that the no trespassing sign was up in letters a mile high. What had changed him? They hadn't even been married for a year. What had she done to make him change? Or was it the position and the money that had changed him? She remembered, too, the questioning feeling she had had about him before they had become engaged, the feeling that somewhere in his make-up there was shifting sand.

"Langdon?"

"What is it?" She wanted to say, 'Don't you love me any more?', but it was the trite, dreary question of ten thousand trite, dreary women—she couldn't bring herself to utter it. Instead she said, and her voice was sad, "How far do you want me to go?"

Langdon laughed. "Honey, don't sound so woe-begone. You're making a whole melodrama out of nothing. I don't want you to go any place. I trust you absolutely, but it's only human that people are more apt to do things for their friends. You have time that I haven't. Get on a friendly footing with Hysander. Go out with him once or twice. See that he frequents the house a little. That way I'll have a better chance to see him out of office hours.

Encourage the natural goodwill he seems to bear you and we're in."

Tears stood in her eyes but she started to laugh a little, too. "You're so funny, darling," she said. "One minute you sound so harsh you frighten me, and the next everything seems all right."

"Of course it's all right. I'm just a man dependent on his beautiful wife, that's all. Come on, it's late. Let's go to bed."

While she was undressing she thought she wouldn't, but once close to him in bed she melted into his arms. Hoping to cheat the uncertainty and the chill sense of loneliness that was growing in her heart she responded passionately to his caress, but their love-making was bereft of the ineffable tenderness and joy they had known, and afterwards, awake, staring into the darkness, she was lonelier than ever.

Ten

CASS was as good as his word. He went to his office, outlined briefly what he suspected might be afoot, and got leave to take as much time as necessary to dig up the facts. Within twelve hours of leaving MacNamara he was on his way to the northwest.

There the going was not easy. He went to the places and tried interviewing the men MacNamara had suggested, but for nearly a week he drew blanks. He seemed to be confronted with three conclusions, and for the life of him he couldn't decide which was valid. Either the ex-Secretary had made poor selections, or the men he saw were truly ignorant of any negotiations in which Joshua Buell Hutchinson might be involved, or they knew something and weren't talking.

His first break came one day in Portland, Oregon, when, in a chance meeting at a club to which he had a guest card, he ran into Dennig Hysander, director of the Land Management Bureau. Hysander was there on business connected with the Department of the Interior. He was pleased when he discovered Cass knew Bishop, and positively effervesced when it developed that he also knew Tansy. "What a girl! What a beauty! Irresistible!" Cass agreed coldly that she was. "Shouldn't mind making a little time with her," Mr. Hysander confided, "but those sexy-looking dames . . . sometimes they're a false alarm."

"No luck, eh?" Cass's expression was solicitous.

"Just give me a little time, though," Hysander said

comfortably. "The Secretary and I are on very friendly terms. I think in due course they may extend to other members of the family." He gave a concupiscent wink. Cass controlled a slight tendency to nausea, and gradually brought the conversation around to the job Langdon Bishop was doing in office, and to the topic of the superb timberlands of the surrounding countryside. "It's interesting to me," he said. "I've only recently learned it, but I understand enormous holdings are often leased to private companies." Mr. Hysander looked surprised at such ignorance. "Oh, yes," he said, "it's common practice. Why, right around here some of the biggest holdings we have were recently taken over by the Pacific Mountain Territories people."

"That a private company?"

Hysander nodded. "It's smaller than its name suggests, but it's an affiliate of the Sunset interests. They're very big out here."

"Timber, are they not?"

"Mining, too."

"I met Mr. Cardwell," Cass said. "Over the past couple of years I've been doing a series on Americans prominent in business and industry. I'd hoped to enlarge the gallery, but I can't say he was very co-operative."

Hysander gave a short laugh. "If you get anything out of Bronson Cardwell you're good. Tight-lipped cuss if ever there was one, but I suppose in business that's an advantage. Nobody knows if you're dumb or smart. You're interested in that kind of thing, though, go up to Seattle. There's another group up there—Northern Consolidated. Len Summerville's the manager, he might be good colour for you."

Cass, who had been thinking Mr. Hysander was a toad

because of his attitude towards Tansy, decided he was perhaps only sexually a toad. His information about the Pacific Mountain Territories and Northern Consolidated was useful. Cass thanked him and left the club to arrange for a flight to Seattle.

There he achieved an interview with Mr. Summerville which proved fruitful in an oblique sort of way. Mr. Summerville had been flattered to be included in a gallery of distinguished American industrialists, but when Cass tried delicately but persistently to uncover the anatomy of Northern Consolidated—he had deduced early in the conversation it was a subordinate branch of wide-spreading mining interests and was curious about the parent concern—Mr. Summerville's co-operation ceased abruptly. Not only that, he suggested pointedly that the State of Washington might be too small for newspapermen who came from the east prying into the affairs of perfect strangers. If Mr. Hanophy valued his health he would do well to leave. The abrupt threat was interesting. Where did the path on which Cass had inadvertently stumbled lead to?

Sometimes, when he mentioned uranium deposits or casually dropped the name of Hutchinson, he was greeted by genuine ignorance, but once or twice he detected a wincing, as though he had tapped a nerve. When that happened the deflections, the detours with which he was confronted were more subtle than the dramatic stone wall of Mr. Summerville, but they all added up to the inescapable conclusion that there were several people operating behind an innocuous façade which they did not want shattered.

The more he saw the more sure Cass was that he and MacNamara were right in their suspicions, but so far he

still had little more than those suspicions to go on. He was beginning to get discouraged, to think that those who were double dealing, if any of them were, need have no fear. He didn't seem able to put his hand on any concrete fact he could use as an explosive agent.

In the end, it was Mr. Hysander who obligingly supplied the dynamite. About ten days after their first meeting Cass saw him again. They bumped into each other in the lobby of the Multnomah Hotel in Portland, and Dennig greeted him like a brother. "Hanophy! This is great! Come on up to the room and have a drink." And he herded him into the elevator. "Well, well," he said after the bell-boy had brought the ice and soda, and they were settled with their highballs. "How's the picture gallery going? Getting any new models?" Cass laughed. "A few," he said, and although he mentioned a couple of the men he had seen he thought it better, on the whole, to be non-committal. Hysander was in Langdon Bishop's department, and Cass was ignorant as to whether he knew about the relationship between his chief and Joshua, whether, indeed—such was his frustration at the moment—there was anything to know. "How's *your* trip panning out?" he asked politely. "How are the lumber and mining interests?"

"Going great guns. One or two fellows in particular." Hysander cupped his hands around a long cigar and lighted it. "You mentioned that you've seen Summerville. Don't suppose you got out to his place, did you?" Cass shook his head. The Summerville hospitality had not been excessive. "Not that you'd have noticed anything one way or another," Hysander continued. "You never knew him before, but, brother, he's really living it up. Got a swimming pool, whale of a thing with heat and lights and a new Cadillac

and a Jaguar for his son. The Summervilles never lived that fancy before. He's *got* to be in the chips, and just recently, I'd say."

Cass pricked up his ears. "Sounds as though trade were brisk."

"You said it. Can't always tell about that business, though. The Eastern banks are pretty well involved in a lot of it, and of course when it comes to forests . . ."

At that moment the telephone rang. Dennig Hysander picked up the receiver. "Hello. Well, Langdon, how's the boss?" he inquired jovially. He put his hand over the mouthpiece. "Bishop," he said to Cass. Then back to the phone. "Fine and dandy. How are you? Where are you calling from? How's everything on the Hill?" He listened attentively for a few minutes. "The report on the Gold Star deposits? Well, sure, I guess I can if you need them, but that's a little irregular, Lang. I mean, Land Management doesn't ordinarily . . ." He was silent again, listening intently. "I see," he said at last. "Well, if it's Federal Coal and Uranium and we can count on the usual office security I'll give the order . . . No, no, the papers won't be held up. It's one of those automatic rulings, but I guess we can waive it for the boss of the Department. What are friends for? How's your beautiful wife, by the way? . . . Well, give her my regards. Tell her I want to buy her a drink when I get back to Washington. . . . Something else? Fire ahead." He winked at Cass—the conspiratorial wink of one engaged in important business—and again he listened for some little time in silence. "Oh, that's too bad," he said finally, and his heavy face looked genuinely distressed. "Isn't there any way. . . ? Uh huh . . . I see. Pity, though, that was a damn' nice thing. People are going to miss it. Oh, sure, sure, I

suppose, under the circumstances, it's got to be. Yeah, sure, I'll tell Leland . . . Right. So long. Oh, say, who do you think . . .?" But apparently, in Washington, Langdon Bishop had hung up. Hysander put down the receiver and continued to sit on the edge of the bed looking uncommonly dejected.

"Any trouble?" Cass inquired.

"No, not really, but it's kind of a shame. I don't get it, exactly." Knowing that the man at the other end of the wire had been Bishop, Cass's curiosity was strong, but patience, he decided, was the better course, and in a moment he was rewarded. Hysander was obviously chagrined and needed to vent his feelings. "Couple of the tree farms out here have a nice custom," he said. "They're open to the general public for picnicking and camping. Not all parts of them, of course, roads and fire hazards have to be considered, but several thousand acres. Now they're going to be closed off."

"That's too bad," Cass said sympathetically. "Was it a custom of long standing?"

"No. That's the funny thing. It was one of the parent companies back east, they were the first to do it—actually, they were the only ones so far, but it looked like a thing that would spread—and because of it they were very popular, but now for some reason they want the public barred."

"I couldn't help hearing," Cass said. "You mentioned Federal Coal and Uranium—do they have tracts out here? Is it one of theirs?"

"Could be, though to tell you the truth—these big holdings—there are so many wheels within wheels it gets confusing as to who owns what. Bishop knows, I imagine, that's more in his line than in mine. It may be they're the

ones who want to keep people out. Lang said something about their being afraid of forest fires with this dry spell they've been having, but between you and me I think it may be the boss himself. You know what a bug he is on fire prevention, and, of course, with picnickers and campers there is always a risk."

"I've heard of the Gold Star deposits," Cass lied—he was making a shrewd guess at uranium—"they're located around here, aren't they?"

Hysander nodded. "Under the timber land." He sighed, and rose from the edge of the bed. "Sorry to have to ask you to leave, Hanophy, it's not very hospitable, but I've got to work on that report Lang wants. I'll have to get in touch with the office in Washington. Apparently he has a meeting coming up in a couple of days and he's got to have it."

"Think nothing of it," Cass said. "You've been very good."

"Can we meet again tomorrow, maybe?" Hysander seemed lonely in the vast northwest, he wanted a playmate. Out of gratitude, Cass was tempted to agree, but duty called him with a bugle blast. "Sorry," he said, "I'll be flying back tonight."

"Oh, too bad. Maybe we'll meet in the east."

"I hope so." Cass shook hands and took his departure, feeling just a little like Judas Iscariot, and hoping that for his own sake the bubble-headed Hysander would never put together the two and two he had handed him on a silver platter.

Cass was certain now of his facts, convinced that his deduction was at least valid enough to pose a question in the Press.

He called W.P.S. in New York and relayed his knowledge and suspicions. That, said his boss drily, was enough, they'd break the story. "And by the way," he added, "congratulations. You've done a hell of a job."

"I guess it had to be," Cass said.

"What's the matter?" inquired the New York voice. "You sound dejected. You ought to be walking on air, boy, you may have cracked the biggest story since the war."

"Yeah, maybe."

"Well, buck up, for Christ's sake, and come on back home. We'll celebrate."

"Be in tomorrow," Cass said. "I'm flying out tonight."

"Good man. So long." Three thousand miles away the receiver clicked into place. As Hysander had done earlier, Cass continued sitting on the edge of his bed in his hotel room, low in his mind. Then he put in a call to Tansy. He could at least warn her, give her time to brace herself for the next day's headlines. Maybe she could get away some place. He found, from the house in Georgetown, that she had already left. "The Secretary and Miz Bishop," came the soft southern drawl, "left two days ago for a little vacation."

"Could you tell me where they are?"

"Well, they said they didn't want any phone calls or business, so I wasn't to say."

"But surely the Secretary left a number or an address where he could be reached, didn't he?"

"Yes, suh, but he left it at his office."

"I see." Cass was stuck, and then providentially the name he had been groping for came back to him. "Is this Gwendolyn?"

"Yes, suh."

"Well, Gwendolyn, don't you remember me? This is Mr. Hanophy. I spent a weekend with Mr. and Mrs. Bishop, remember? You gave me your recipe for gumbo."

The voice grew more cordial. Cass fancied he could see Gwendolyn's flashing smile across a continent. "Why, sho enough, Mr. Hanophy, I do remember. How you all?"

"I'm fine, thanks. Listen, Gwendolyn, Mrs. Bishop and I are very old friends, and I've got something important to tell her. I'm sure she wouldn't mind your letting me know where they are."

Gwendolyn was unhappy. She liked Cass, he had joked with her and given her a good tip, but her employer had said firmly that only in an emergency was she to reveal their whereabouts, only if the White House itself should want the Secretary, or if her New York office said it was vital to reach her. Gwendolyn temporized, "Maybe you all could write her, Mr. Hanophy, an' you could send the letter here and I'd forward it."

"There's not time for that. Look, I promise you, if Mrs. Bishop is angry I'll take all the blame, and I'm sure she won't be. Please tell me how I can reach her. This is an emergency."

Gwendolyn was relieved; an emergency made everything all right.

"Well, in that case," she said expansively, "I guess I'm permitted to let you know where they are. They are at Mr. Joshua Buell Hutchinson's plantation in Georgia."

"What?" Cass started from the bed in surprise.

"Yes, suh. Miz Bishop says there was to be a little small house-party they was going to for a few days. I expect them back next Tuesday. The name of the plantation, I believe, is Crossways."

"Yes, I know. It's very good of you, Gwendolyn. I'm grateful. Thanks a lot."

"When you all coming down to see us, Mr. Hanophy?"

"I don't know. I'm a long way from Georgetown at the moment. Portland, Oregon."

"Portland, Oregon. You don't say. I guess that's mighty far."

"Far and expensive, Gwendolyn. I've got to hang up now, but thanks for the information. Thanks a lot."

Cass was puzzled. What on earth had happened to make Joshua acknowledge his old friendship with the Bishops, to have them, indeed, as guests at the plantation?

He was in no hurry to warn Langdon or Hutchinson of the storm about to break, but he was still harassed by the thought of Tansy, yet obviously the moment she knew she would tell the others. Cass decided he would make one more effort and let fate take it from there.

He spent two hours trying to reach Crossways, but the circuits were busy. Then he gave up, threw his clothes into his suitcase, and left for the airport.

The means by which Tansy had got herself and Langdon to Crossways had taken a little manœuvring but were simple enough. On her next visit to New York, a few days after the one on which she had seen Cass, she had simply dropped in to Joshua's apartment late in the afternoon and found him at home. He seemed genuinely glad to see her, and although he made plausible excuses when she accused him of having deserted her and Langdon, she sensed that he had missed them.

Was there any real reason, she demanded, for the

alienation of affection that they found so distressing? He hesitated, but finally he did say with every appearance of sincerity that he felt for Langdon's sake it would be better if they were not linked as friends. "Supposing sometime, which would be perfectly possible, considering my interests, I had to do business with him? If it was known that we were great friends it would put him in an awkward position, and it would be embarrassing to me. This job isn't forever, you know, but I feel for all our sakes it is more prudent for us not to see too much of each other while it does last."

"I see," Tansy said. There was a pause, and then abruptly she asked the question. "Josh, how did Langdon get the job?"

Taken by surprise, he hesitated a moment. "What do you mean, how? I brought him to Swazey's attention—he's chairman of the Party, you know. He thought it was a good idea and spoke to the President. The President knew his record, recommended him to the Senate, and that was that."

"But what about the other man, MacNamara? Wasn't he good at the job?" Joshua looked at her curiously. "What do you worry about him for?"

"I don't—exactly. But I heard a rather odd story."

"Listen, chick," Joshua said candidly, "if you heard anything about a love affair involving him and the wife of another Cabinet member you probably heard right. So did the President. The situation was too risky and he was glad to see MacNamara go."

"I did hear that, but there was something else, too. About how he went."

"Oh? What was that?"

Miserable because of her knowledge, longing to have it explained away, and fearful in spite of herself that Langdon

was in jeopardy as Cass had said, Tansy sought reassurance by attempting to renew the old friendly ties. "Josh, look . . . I would like to talk to you . . . couldn't we have a little time together as we used to, you and Nora and Lang and I? Couldn't we maybe go down to Crossways for a weekend? Nobody would have to know we were there, and maybe everything would come right again."

Joshua studied her for a minute. Apparently, in some way, she had got hold of the MacNamara story, but beyond that she couldn't possibly know anything. Yet. Still, she was a smart girl. It might be wise not to antagonize her—he just might need her to help keep Bishop in line. "Okay," he said, and the tone was warm and friendly. "If you kids want to come down for a few days, that's just what we'll do. But mind, I mean what I say about keeping things under wraps to some extent. We'll have a little house-party. How would you like that?"

Tansy smiled with relief. "Joshua, you're sweet. But not too big a party. Our dark secret mustn't leak."

"Don't worry. Jake and maybe one or two others from the family and that's it. No mob scene, and don't advertise your whereabouts. It's nobody's damn' business who you and Lang see."

"Oh, we won't. Oh, it will be wonderful to have it like old times again."

This was the change of heart and venue that so startled Cass when he learned of it from the Bishops' maid.

Joshua had sent one of the company planes to pick up Tansy and Langdon and take them to the plantation. He and Nora flew directly from New York and joined them

on the first evening, Tuesday, in time for dinner. Jake Greenleaf and Marvin Considine, Joshua's lawyer, were to fly down the next day. Mr. Considine duly arrived, but Greenleaf was delayed. He would be there, he said, on Friday. They heard from him, however, before that.

Late Thursday night he received a piece of information that he thought of sufficient cogency to disturb the slumbers of his chief. He called him on the direct wire connecting Crossways with the office shortly before one o'clock. "Trouble," he said tersely to a Joshua still clinging to a sleep the telephone bell had dissipated. "W.P.S. has sent out a release questioning the propriety of Bishop's handling of the northwest timber lands. Apparently they're demanding an explanation of the status of the deposits under the lease." Sleep abandoned Mr. Hutchinson. "Have you seen the papers?" "Not yet," Jake replied. "They haven't appeared yet. I've sent over to the Times and Tribune and News. I'll have them as soon as they're off the presses."

"Then you don't know if Sunset or Pacific Mountain are mentioned?"

"No, but that doesn't worry me too much. We're pretty well bulwarked from all angles. It'll be a long time before they can pull any direct legal action, and if they do they're likely to find themselves batting the empty air. We've got responsibility widely distributed. Far as we're concerned it'll be mighty hard to pin anything on anybody." Joshua gave a short laugh. It sounded like a bark. "Bishop'll be in a fine state."

"You certainly picked your time," Greenleaf said. "You haven't seen him in months, and now he's under your roof. My advice to you is to get him out of there."

"I don't know," Joshua said after a moment's thought.

"As soon as I hang up I'll wake Marvin, but I think a quick dispatch might be risky. If he's seen leaving the joint surreptitiously it'll look suspicious."

"Why does he have to be seen?" Jake demanded.

"Because, my friend, there are no trains out of here till early afternoon, by which time you may be sure we'll be visited by the Press, and I can't get a plane down before mid-morning, and even that'll probably be too late."

"He can always drive."

"You forget we have a movie star on our hands. He and Tanse would be recognized at the first filling station they stopped at. The hell with it, let him stay. It's better to have him where we can keep an eye on him."

"Well, you won't be keeping him long, in any event. I imagine the President will be interested in a little heart-to-heart talk."

"Yes," Joshua said thoughtfully, "we'll have to do a bit of coaching. It may be just as well to have him here for a day or two."

"There'll be a squawk out of Washington the minute the papers hit the street."

"He'll have to develop a high fever, that's all. Unable to travel for at least twenty-four hours," Jake grunted. "You'd better get down here yourself," Joshua continued. "Marvin'll probably want two or three of his boys along too. You at the office now?"

"Getting such rest as I can on this goddamn slippery leather couch you're so nuts about."

"Good. Stay there and call me back soon as you've seen the papers. I'll talk to Marvin and see who he wants you to bring down with you."

Half an hour later Joshua and his lawyer set the wheels

in motion, and before noon the next day a plane alighted on Crossways' private landing strip bearing Mr. Greenleaf, assorted aides, and stacks of newspapers.

Also descending from the sky on to the peaceful purlieus of Thomasville was a fair segment of the American Press. The W.P.S. release and the resultant headlines had triggered acute and widespread interest in the activities of the Secretary of the Interior. Joshua Buell Hutchinson was not yet implicated. It was the rumour that public lands were being used to private advantage, the scent of corruption rather than the substance, that drew the newsmen. They had quickly learned of Bishop's whereabouts and were avid for contact.

With a Secretary taut as a fiddle string on his hands, it was this Joshua was doing his best to prevent. He stationed guards at the driveways leading to the house, but the property was immense. It was impossible to post the entire plantation, and as the day wore on newspapermen wandered the woods and swamps hoping for a glimpse of at least one of the principals if not of the star himself. These either stayed stubbornly within or took the air briefly in a walled garden.

The White House called, and pinned by the unwavering stare of Hutchinson, Greenleaf, and their battery of legal lights, Mr. Bishop was able to give a creditable impression of a man with a high temperature unable to travel. He had come south to try to get rid of a bad cold, he said. Yes, he had seen the papers and had made an effort to return to Washington that morning, but the doctor had absolutely forbidden it . . . he was at a loss to understand the innuendoes in the Press . . . his conduct had been perfectly ethical . . . yes, by all means, he would be at the White

House Monday morning regardless of health. He hung up and wiped the sweat from his face. His remarks on his physical condition had been more an exaggeration than a downright lie. He was feeling far from well. He was also irritated by Joshua, whose calm was more unnerving than comforting. Langdon was partially heartened by the fact that his patron was taking the débâcle so philosophically. On the other hand, there was something slightly ominous in Joshua's cool conviction that he himself had nothing to worry about. There was obviously a bag, someone in all likelihood would be left holding it and Langdon did not care for himself in the role. He felt strongly that, as he was in trouble for Joshua's sake, the great man should be the one to get him out of it. Wanting to see evidence of such intention he turned to Tansy, although his sentiments towards her were a little grim. "You will note that this malarky about my department illegally leasing rights to suspected uranium deposits is a W.P.S. release. Your friend Hanophy had nothing to do with it, I suppose?"

"Langdon, how do I know?" she cried. "I told you about my conversation with him. He never mentioned anything about all this other business. He just told me of the blackmailing of MacNamara and wanted me to warn *you* to be on your guard. And you see he was right. Something has happened to you."

"I'll say it has, and I expect Josh to get me off the hook."

It was late in the day—some hours after the telephone call from the White House, and they were in their own quarters. The room was very big—half living room, half bedroom, with easy-chairs and a long sideboard. Langdon went to it now and poured himself a stiff drink from a crystal decanter. "Want one?" Tansy shook her head.

"You can help me with Joshua, Tan. He'll listen to you—he's fond of you. All he has to do is come forward, say he owns Sunset which in turn controls Pacific Mountain, and that there's nothing to the suspicion—to this . . . to this absurd accusation." He threw down the newspaper he had been carrying most of the day. "The whole deal is in the clear—the legitimate timber lands lease, and that's all."

Tansy searched his face. "Is it? Oh, Lang, is everything really all right? You haven't done anything—well, anything shady, have you?"

"What does that mean? Do you think I'm a crook of some kind?"

"I don't know. I'm desperate. I don't think you would knowingly or intentionally do anything dishonourable, but you may have let yourself be jockeyed into a position where whatever you do you'll be suspect, even if you're not culpable."

"I see. Even though I'm innocent, I'm a stinker. That's a pretty brutal set-up, don't you think?"

"Yes. It's untenable, of course. If Joshua's responsible for the trouble, he's *got* to get you out of it."

"Honey, look. This whole thing's a tempest in a tea cup. Josh asked to see a report on some mines—some mineral deposits in the northwest. Matter of fact it was *your* pal, Hysander, who released them. In some way, Christ only knows how, someone got wind of it—but it's nothing to get in a sweat about. Perfectly normal procedure."

"You're sure?"

"Sure I'm sure. I've a right to see the reports of my own department, haven't I? These newshounds act as though they've treed a bear. God, the laugh'll be on them. There isn't even a kitten on the premises."

"But the President called, wanting to speak to you. Why didn't you go at once, Lang? To vindicate yourself——"

"How can I vindicate myself when I haven't done anything? The President's got to have time to simmer down, and Joshua's got to speak up—to clarify the situation."

"Well, *tell* him so, why don't you?" It seemed to her odd that he hesitated, but he did. "I . . . I can't," he said, "Not right this minute. I'm so mad I might say something I'd regret. I expect him to come to my defence, but I don't want to antagonize him."

"Why not?" And as he didn't answer, she said slowly, "Because of the money?"

He looked at her, and his eyes were cold. "Partially, yes. It's yours as much as mine, don't forget. No point in throwing it down the drain. And that could happen, if he gets mad enough." He went to the sideboard and poured himself another drink. When he turned around his mouth was twisted in the old deprecatory, charming smile. "Darling, you speak to him, won't you? You'll do it so much better than I."

He looked somehow pathetic. Tansy's heart ached. He was magnificent and helpless. If he was innocent or guilty, she didn't know. In a sense, it didn't matter. If he was guilty of dishonouring his position, then the fact that that was his nature was poignant enough. Either way he was pitiable. As she stood looking at him her life seemed like a piece of dry earth crumbling to dust. She had been sitting on the arm of the couch. In a tired kind of way she pulled herself up. "I'll go and speak to Joshua," she said dully.

Joshua was composed, though he eyed her questioningly. "I'm not surprised that a newspaperman got the

story," he said. "From their point of view it's a nugget, but that this particular newspaperman got it is interesting."

"What particular newspaperman?"

"Mr. Hanophy. Isn't he the kingpin at World Press Service?"

"What are you driving at, Josh?" she demanded angrily. "My God, you don't think *I* gave Cass this information, do you? I knew nothing about it, nothing. I hardly know what you and the newspapers are talking about right now. And if I had known anything, do you think for one minute I'd have blabbed it and wrecked Langdon's position *and* my own?"

"What would you have done?" one of the lawyers asked.

"I'd have urged my husband to reverse himself. As quickly and as quietly as possible. I'd have urged him to resign, if that was the only way to stop the whole shameful business."

"What makes you think it's so shameful?" Joshua asked blandly.

"Well, look at the papers. Their whole attitude is questioning, censorious, as though something . . . well, as though something pretty bad had happened."

Joshua shook his head, amused. "For a girl in the publicity business you certainly are naïve. Do you believe every release that's sent to you? Some of them are pretty screwball, aren't they?"

"Yes, but that's . . . that's different."

"Why? Sensational headlines make sales. Newspapers discovered that a long time ago. The better papers don't go in for sex crimes and hatchet murders. That's why they latch all the more on to what they consider 'dignified'

scandal. Anything piquant in Government or politics is duck soup."

"Yes, but a man like . . . I mean a responsible reporter . . . they're not scandal-mongers."

Joshua looked at her closely. "You weren't going to say 'a man like Cass Hanophy' by any chance, were you?"

"Joshua, don't *ride* me. I don't know what to think, I'm stunned." She was. If it was Cass who was responsible for the hue and cry now engulfing them it seemed to her incredible that he had given her no warning. That wasn't like him. He'd come to her straight out with the blackmail story. He had compassion. Surely he would have realized that if Langdon was in for a bad time it would be less painful for her to learn it from her old friend than from a hostile Press. It never occurred to her that Cass might have tried to reach her and have been unsuccessful.

Suddenly a new fear assailed her. She turned to Marvin Considine. "There isn't any danger of Langdon's going to prison, is there?"

"Now, now, now," said the lawyer. "Take it easy. I grant you the headlines are noisy, but there's nothing to prove your husband has done anything he shouldn't. All this," he pointed to the New York and Washington papers scattered around the room, "is talk and conjecture. It isn't *proof*."

"Oh, Josh, you'll do something, won't you?" Her eyes were full of tears. "Please, please. You were so *for* Lang. It was through you he got the job. If you've done anything, inadvertently even, to put him on a spot, surely you'll go to the President and explain."

"If I've done anything?" he said righteously. "What in God's name are you talking about?"

"Langdon said something about some companies you control . . . Sunset, I think, and another one."

Joshua and Greenleaf glanced at each other. Joshua looked at her with a curious expression. "He mentioned those, did he?" She nodded. "Well, he's mistaken, Tansy. I don't 'control' them, as you were told. They are quite autonomous organizations. I did help Langdon, yes, and I've always liked him, and despite all this brouhaha I'm not sure he's done anything unethical, but if he *has*, or if it looks as though he has, it's up to him to clear himself and his office."

There was a stir in the doorway. They looked up to see Langdon standing there. "What do you mean, you don't control Sunset and Pacific Mountain Territories? They're subsidiaries of companies you do control."

"Oh, Langdon, come in." Joshua seemed very poised in contrast to the Secretary who was flushed and dishevelled. It occurred to Tansy that he must have drunk more than she realized.

"Come in," Joshua said again. "What you say is interesting but inaccurate. I'm afraid you'll have a hard time tracing those companies back to any of our holdings."

"I'm afraid I will too, but it's what I intend to do just the same if you try any double-cross on me." His diction was a little slurred, his manner almost affable, but there was an expression in Joshua's eyes that Tansy had never seen before, and it frightened her.

"Lang, please dear," she said, "you're tired and upset. Why don't you go up to the room and rest a while?"

"That's just a little joke, honey. Mr. Hutchinson wouldn't try to double-cross me. Mr. Hutchinson's my friend, and I'm a friend of Mr. Hutchinson's. I'm such a good

friend that I get him reports that, strictly speaking, he's not supposed to see."

"But you told me . . ." Tansy interjected. Langdon waved her aside. "Mr. Hutchinson knows that, so—as I did him a favour—he'll do me one, I'm sure. He'll not let the President or the American public, the great pure public, think ill of their Secretary of the Interior. No indeedy deed. Because, you see, if they find out that he and Mr. Hutchinson are close friends they might think Mr. Hutchinson was playing on that friendship to get something he shouldn't have, and that wouldn't look very nice."

"You're drunk," Jake Greenleaf said. Langdon bowed. "I have had a little of my host's excellent Scotch. Better not let the natives know about that. Heart of the southland, and Scotch instead of bourbon." He clucked disapprovingly. "Have to watch these little betrayals. Word gets around. Gives a man a bad name."

"I suggest you look to your own name," Joshua said. "You know politics better than I do, and business just as well. Personally speaking, if you *have* done anything foolish, I can sympathize. We all make mistakes. But I'm not a solitary individual. I can't jeopardize the good names of any of the organizations I'm involved with by seeming to condone dishonesty in high places. Supposing, of course, dishonesty exists."

Langdon swayed just a little. "Why, you fraudulent son of a bitch," he said softly, "you don't give a good God damn about the sanctity of your 'organizations'. You feel the water's getting hot and you want to save your own skin. Go ahead and save it, but I'm not going to scald my arse shielding you."

"You know," Joshua said, "your gratitude touches me."

Really touches me. I give you a quarter of a million dollars and I make you Secretary of the Interior and my reward is drunken insults."

"And the beauty of it is," Langdon said with a sweeping gesture of both arms, "this splendid generosity was entirely for my sake. You wanted nothing, oh, no, just a great gorgeous slice of the country's . . ."

"You knew the terms of the deal," Jake Greenleaf cut in brusquely. "If you're not satisfied it can always be terminated. It looks as though you yourself may have ended your term of office, and the financial angle can be readjusted. Stock transactions are always gambles to some extent. Gains aren't automatic, you know." For the first time since he had come into the room Langdon seemed to notice Greenleaf. He stared at him for a moment, and then he said, with more sobriety than he had been showing, "You'd voluntarily depress the market for the pure pleasure of ruining me, wouldn't you?"

Greenleaf shrugged. "I am merely pointing out that threats are poor currency. If you will reassess your position I think you will find that you need us more than we need you."

Joshua rose as one who terminates an interview. "All you have to do is sit tight and ride out the storm that has hit *you* in *your* position of Secretary of the Interior. You've got guts, and by now you should have considerable know-how. Plus which Considine and the lads will brief you before you have to testify. Conduct yourself as you should—you'll be doing the job you were paid for and you keep the money. If you don't . . . well, as Jake here says . . . the stock market's a gamble. Suckers get taken."

Langdon turned away. He moved aimlessly about the

room until Tansy went over and took him by the arm. "Lang, please, let's go upstairs. You must get some rest. You've been awake since two o'clock this morning." She herself was exhausted. She longed for the oblivion of sleep, and she wanted to go far away from Crossways. From Langdon and from Joshua, from the callous indifference, the searing recrimination and dishonesty that seemed, like a dirty tide, to be rising and engulfing her. The husband she had adored and the old friend of her childhood were crooks. There was little to choose between them. Still, perhaps because he *was* her husband, Langdon seemed to her the less venal. His actions, from what she could gather, were folly and dishonesty compounded, but ambition was the goad that drove him. However shabby, he had a reason. His behaviour, unadmirable though it was, was understandable. But what was one to say of Joshua? He had the world. Chicanery, on his part, was a purely gratuitous evil.

Late that night, when the lights were out and she lay in bed staring into the blackness, the one human being she wanted to see was Cass. The resentment she had held against him for what she had felt to be his meddling had been washed away.

Cass, although she could only believe now with Langdon and Joshua that he was responsible for the World Press Service release that had triggered the uproar, Cass was honest. Not comforting, not appealing, but bed rock and solid under foot. By the laws of logic she should be hating him. Instead, with the house surrounded by the Press, she could only wonder, a little wryly, where he was.

The next day, Saturday, was a kind of nightmare. The telephones rang incessantly and were answered, or at times the receivers simply removed from their cradles, by Nora

and one of the lawyers. The papers uncovered further questionable actions by the Secretary and revealed that a Senate investigating committee was in the process of formation. Under sheer pressure, Langdon spoke to a couple of reporters on the phone, and he reiterated his promise to return to Washington on Monday. "Bishop to take stand," ran the headlines. "Secretary lashes out at groundless rumours." "Illness delays meeting with President."

It was late Saturday afternoon after three photographers with telescopic lenses had been chased out of trees by the servants and the local police that Joshua announced he was surfeited with the whole damn' mess and was going fishing. "I'll take one of the coloured boys along and stay at the lodge over night. I doubt if the gentlemen of the Press have discovered its existence, and if they've found it empty once they're not likely to return, or to think someone from the house has gone down there."

The fishing lodge was small, primitive, but comfortably equipped. It was situated on a wide lake, one of the chain that looped the plantation like a necklace about a mile and a half from the big house, and far from the main road. "Will you be all right there?" Nora asked. "You don't want one of us along?" Joshua shook his head. "I trust none of you lovely people will be offended if I say I could use a little solitude. Joady can get me some dinner and get me up at five for a little fishing. I'll be back sometime tomorrow afternoon." He turned to Marvin Considine. "You and the boys draw up a statement." And with a nod at Bishop, "Coach our pal here on proper procedure before an investigating committee. I always told you it was a mistake," he added cheerfully, addressing his remarks to Nora and Tansy, "to tangle with the Senate. Damn' bloody bore.

Keeps a man from doing his job. Glad I'm not involved."

Despite her resentment and despair, Tansy could not help but salute, albeit with a certain bitter amusement, the sheer ebullient gall of the brigand, inviolate behind his power and money.

In a short time the coloured boy brought the trap around to a side door of the house, and Joshua drove off with cheery assurances that they should have fish for to-morrow night's dinner.

Saturday night, if possible, was more painful than the one before. At least, then, heavy with fatigue and liquor, Langdon had fallen into a deep sleep. Tonight, outraged though he was with Joshua, he seemed to miss his presence. The Hutchinson arrogance and assurance, even the implication of a financial débâcle, had given him something to hold to. He was still in the orbit of the lode star. Deprived of him, Langdon's morale foundered. His mood fluctuated between fear and confidence, and always he lashed out at Hanophy as his wife's closest friend who had brought him to the parlous state in which he found himself.

Towards dawn she turned on him. "For God's sake, Lang, stop repeating yourself. I'm sorry that Cass ever found out anything, sorrier than you are, I think, but the finding out is the least of it. If you hadn't done something you shouldn't have, there'd have been nothing to find out. Don't blame him for that." She looked so distracted, she seemed so remote from him, that his manner altered. Suddenly he felt desperately alone. "Tansy, please. Don't you turn against me too. You're not going to leave me, are you?"

As the day before, she was touched by his vulnerability. "No, Lang. No. Certainly I wouldn't leave you now,

while you're in trouble." His spirits rose again. "Then you won't leave me at all! We'll pull through this, you'll see. Hell, they may look on what I've done as a little irregular, but it's nothing I can't talk my way out of. If only Josh would come through, he's got nothing to lose. He could smooth the whole thing over and still not get in a jam."

"He really could make that much difference?"

"Yes. Believe me."

"Very well, then. I'll try once more."

"Oh, Tanse, darling, will you?"

She nodded. "I may not get any place with him—I didn't last time—but I'll try once more. His reaction to this is incredible. So cold and yet somehow so superficial. If I can move him in some way; if just once he can be made to see another person's point of view. I'll talk to him in the morning." She glanced at her watch. "I guess it's almost that now."

"But he won't be back here at the house till late this afternoon."

"I'll go to the lodge," she said. "I'd just as soon see him alone without that phalanx of lawyers and Prince Charming Greenleaf."

"He'll be fishing, won't he?"

"I'll go later on. I've got to get some sleep, I'm reeling, but I'll go later in the morning. You get some too, you must be dead." They went to bed and were asleep in minutes.

About ten o'clock Tansy wakened. She looked over at the other bed. Langdon lay completely relaxed, his head half under the pillow. She got up quietly, gathered her clothes, and dressed in the big bathroom. She went downstairs, but a Sunday morning calm had settled over the

house. No one was about, and even the telephone only rang two or three times and was answered by the butler who had orders to say that no one could be disturbed. One of the Negro maids brought her breakfast, and she glanced at the papers. They seemed to be marking time. The next surge would come tomorrow, after Langdon had returned to Washington.

Tansy finished her toast and coffee and started for the lodge, mentally rehearsing her appeal to Joshua. Her indignation rose as she went. Through pleading, through anger, through her family connection with him, slight as it was, somehow she would reach him. By some means, no matter how drastic, he must be made to shoulder his share of the responsibility for the explosion that was rocking them all. Langdon, she was determined, should not bear the brunt alone.

She walked for some little time, for once or twice she missed the way and made wrong turnings, so that it was nearly three-quarters of an hour before she came to the lake and the little house she was looking for. The lodge was a structure of logs containing a big central room, two bedrooms and a bath and kitchen wing with accommodation for servants giving off a narrow back hall. Tansy had come upon the house from the rear, and she entered quietly through the back door. It was about half past eleven and she assumed that if Joshua had been fishing since before dawn he must surely have returned by now.

The doors to the two servants' rooms were open, and a glance told her they were empty. She couldn't see into the living room because an old woollen curtain hung in the doorway. As she stood in the little hallway, uncertain as to how to proceed, outdoors a man stepped from the woods

and stared curiously at the lodge. It was Cass. He had arrived in Thomasville that morning to be greeted by one or two remaining colleagues. Frustrated, the others had departed, deciding that the first real break in the story would come with Langdon Bishop's return to the capital.

Cass thought so himself, but he wanted to talk to Tansy. Having been unable to reach her on the telephone he had decided to come to the plantation to reconnoitre on the chance of seeing her. Barred, as others had been, at the driveway, he had entered the property some distance away and was wandering about looking for a path that would lead him back to the main house when he came to the edge of the woods and spotted the lodge. The place seemed very quiet, and he stood for a few minutes debating whether or not he should go in. He was starting towards it when a shot rang out. He spun around, but even as he did so he realized the shot came from the house. Curious, and suddenly tense, he stepped behind a big honeysuckle bush beside the path, waiting to see what might happen. For a few moments everything was quiet. Silence settled again on the peaceful scene; the sun shone on the woods, the marshland, and the lazily lapping water. Cass was about to step forward when the back door burst open and Tansy ran out. Seeing it was she he opened his mouth to call her, but as she passed close by the bush he saw her stricken face and her dress stained with blood. His voice died in his throat. She ran past, stumbling and panting, unaware that he was there. Cass watched her until the path wound into the woods and she was lost to sight. Then he turned and walked swiftly towards the lodge. He knocked on the screen door. "Anybody here?" he called. Getting no answer, he went in. He walked down the little hall, pushed aside the woollen curtain, entered the living

room, and saw Joshua's body crumpled on the floor near a big flat-topped desk. He walked over and stared down at it, and his face turned white. "Oh, Jesus Christ," he whispered. "Oh, Tansy, what have you done?" She had had no gun in her hands when she passed him, and he looked swiftly around the room. There was fishing tackle about, and a gun case and gun racks at the far end, but a quick glance assured him that none was missing. He strode across the room and pulled open the front door. He saw the finger of woodland that came almost up to the porch on that side, he saw the wide, shining lake and thought he knew what had happened to the gun. If only it's deep enough, he thought, if only they can't drag it.

At the coroner's inquest it was established that Joshua had died from a shot from a .38 automatic, but the gun had not yet been found.

When Tansy stumbled back to the house Sunday morning with the terrible news that she had discovered Joshua's body, both the hastily summoned doctor and the local police officials scarcely bothered to conceal the fact that murder was indicated and that they considered her guilty. She stared at them, stupefied, when she realized what was in their minds, but rumour and gossip were rife in the small community, and through the grape-vine word had spread that there had been long discussions and violent quarrels between the Secretary and his host.

The first reaction was that Langdon must have shot him, but then they reasoned that Tansy would not have come running so quickly with the news. It must have been she who had done it, the loving wife goaded by what her

husband was undergoing—not, of course, that the husband wasn't guilty as all hell in that awful scandal—but she was defending him. She shot Hutchinson and made up the story that she found him dead, and it certainly didn't hold water. You notice there was no mention of who else might have done it. Nobody else had a motive and nobody else was suspected. By now the newspaper accounts were beginning to trace a connection between the northwest uranium deposits and companies which might conceivably be controlled—although of that there was yet no proof—by other companies guided by Joshua Buell Hutchinson. And if Hutchinson and Bishop were pals, as had been hinted, and had had a falling out—well, it was a juicy and thrilling mystery, and the community, not to mention the country at large, was in a turmoil of excitement.

Thomasville and its immediate environs were like Times Square on New Year's Eve as the Press of the world and the lunatic fringe of morbid sensation seekers poured in. The price of lodgings and food skyrocketed—twenty-five, fifty dollars a night for a room. A pint of bourbon cost fifteen. Toy pistols, small stamped metal replicas of the Capitol dome and of mining equipment were hawked in the streets. Nobody knew how they had been manufactured and transported there with such speed.

The small courthouse where the inquest was being held was jammed to suffocation. Since a Cabinet member already in the headlines was now involved in a murder, the most stately representatives of the Times of New York and of London were reporting the proceedings. Langdon and Tansy were, in a sense, Washington's own, and as he was now temporarily restrained by circumstances from facing a Congressional investigating committee not only the entire

Press of the Capitol but Government figures of prominence milled through the narrow corridors. Even Walter Lippman came. The New Yorker sent Rebecca West, and the Journal American contributed Dorothy Kilgallen. Newsreel cameramen pullulated in the courthouse square and inquiring reporters buttonholed obscure citizens and celebrated names for their opinion of the guilt or innocence of Tansy Delafield Bishop. Delirium boiled and bubbled through the streets. The occasion was every bit as satisfactory as the Hall-Mills murder or the Lindburgh kidnapping trial.

Meanwhile, on the third day, in the courtroom proper where the inquest was taking place, a harassed coroner was fighting a losing battle with himself in a struggle for impartiality, but he too had caught the fever. Tansy was obviously guilty. Langdon was on the witness stand. He spoke strongly of his wife's good character, of her long friendship with Joshua Buell Hutchinson, and of the general kindness of her nature.

"Do you believe your wife shot Mr. Hutchinson?" the coroner asked. The pause before Langdon's "No" was imperceptible to all but every reporter in the room. "Bishop uncertain of wife's innocence," shrieked the more uninhibited of the next morning's headlines.

Dudley Woodman, one of Marvin Considine's colleagues who worked for another law firm, had somewhat surprisingly offered to represent Tansy. He was on his feet in an instant. "Mr. Linton," he said, addressing the coroner, "may I point out that what the witness believes is not pertinent. Does he *know* whether or not his wife shot Mr. Hutchinson?"

"I do not," Langdon said, and this time his tone was firm. 'Firm in this instance possible construe as uncertain',

scribbled the representative of the Chicago Tribune in a memo to himself. "Knowing my wife, however," Langdon continued, "I am convinced she could not have done it." A murmur ran through the courtroom. The coroner turned to Tansy.

"Mrs. Bishop, will you tell us, please, exactly what happened when you went to the lodge Sunday morning. You admit that you did go there and that you went alone?"

Tansy nodded. "Yes, I did."

"Why?"

"I wanted to speak to Mr. Hutchinson."

"What about?"

"He and my husband had had . . . well, I felt . . . I mean, there was something I wanted to ask him to do for my husband."

"Something you wanted him to do in a business way?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

Mr. Woodman rose again. His position was equivocal. Legally he had no right to object to a statement made by the coroner, but subtly he might influence the jury. The legality of his exceptions and interruptions were not likely to concern them. The colour of them, the implications, they would remember. "If I may say so," he said mildly, "the nature of the business she wanted to discuss is not germane to the witness's testimony."

"I consider that it is," snapped the coroner.

"It is not," said Mr. Woodman.

"Proceed," the coroner said to Tansy.

"Well, I was rather upset and it took me a little time to find my way."

"Would you not put it more strongly, Mrs. Bishop?"

the coroner suggested. "Would you not say that when you went to the lodge you were very angry indeed with Mr. Hutchinson?"

Woodman started up again and turned to the jury, his hands outstretched in a kind of comic dismay. "Ladies and gentlemen, it is quite untenable, quite untenable that the coroner should impute to the witness the emotion she was feeling."

The jurors glanced at one another. "Quite, quite. How right, how right," their expressions seemed to say.

The coroner looked at counsel with cold dislike and tried another tack. "You were upset, Mrs. Bishop, and it took you a little time to find your way. What happened when you got there?"

Tansy sat twisting her handkerchief in her lap. There was a long pause before she spoke. The crowded courtroom was absolutely still. "The lodge fronts on the water," she said at last. "I came out of the woods and went up the path to the back door. I went in and stood for a moment in the little back hall to see if anyone was about. There are two servants' rooms, one on either side of it, but they were both empty. I couldn't see into the living room at the end of the hall, although it's only a few feet, because a curtain was hanging there. I called out."

"What did you call?"

"I called Mr. Hutchinson. I said, 'Joshua, are you there?'"

"And was he? What did he say?"

"There was no answer." She stopped.

"Go on," said the coroner, "what happened then?"

"I called out again and then I went down the hall and pushed aside the curtain and entered the room."

"Speak up, please, we can hardly hear you."

Tansy cleared her throat. "I'm sorry. I went into the room and there lying on the floor I saw Josh . . . I saw Mr. Hutchinson. I stared at him a moment. I could hardly believe it, but I knew he was dead. I knelt down beside him. There was a wound in his chest. The blood was seeping out. That . . . that's how it got on my dress and on my hands."

"When you got back to the house you reported he had been murdered. How did you know it wasn't suicide?"

"Joshua would never have committed suicide," she said simply. "Besides, I looked around. There was no gun."

"Then what did you do?"

"I ran out the front door to see if anyone was about. The lodge is almost directly on the lake. There's a little dock in front of it, usually with a couple of boats tied up. They were there, but there was nobody in them and nobody on the river. There's a . . . a sort of finger of woods that comes down almost to the porch. The person who had done it could have run into the woods. They'd be lost to view very quickly."

"That is your impression of what happened?"

"Mr. Linton, I really must point out that this form of questioning, under the circumstances, is peculiar, to say the least," said Mr. Woodman. He turned to the jury. "You see, ladies and gentlemen," he explained, and his manner was straightforward and friendly, "the coroner is leading the witness, and legally and *humanely* that isn't . . ."

"Will you please," said the coroner in the voice of one at the end of his tether, "will you please let me get on with the examination of this witness so we may get at the facts? You say, Mrs. Bishop, that blood was still seeping from the wound, therefore it was fresh, and you had been standing in

the hallway for some minutes. Five minutes? Ten minutes?"

"No. No. Not so long. Just long enough to look about and see if there was anybody there and call out."

"It seems very strange," said the coroner slowly, "that in those minutes you heard no shot."

"It . . . it must have happened just before I got there," Tansy said. "Your theory, then, is that some unknown assailant, for a motive even more unknown, confronted Mr. Hutchinson, shot him, and departed, thoughtfully taking the gun with him? That would be very handy, Mrs. Bishop, very handy indeed."

Shaken, her eyes wide with fear, Tansy's look appealed first to Langdon, then to Mr. Woodman. The latter was already on his feet. "As I understand the law, Mr. Linton, it is the coroner's duty not to build a case against a particular person but to determine the cause of death. The cause was a shot from a .38 automatic. Who fired it, we do not know."

"That is correct, sir," replied Mr. Linton, his tone as thin as a thick southern accent could get, "but it may well be that a particular person's guilt can be indicated by the evidence adduced at this inquest." Feeling that he had scored rather neatly, he tugged at his tightly buttoned, high breasted jacket and bowed slightly to his opponent.

"However," Woodman retorted, "from the witness's own testimony and that of her husband we know she lacked one little ingredient. Inclination. Also, we have yet to see the weapon."

"She could easily have thrown the gun in the lake," observed Mr. Linton.

"You have been dragging the river for two days, have you not," Woodman asked, "and without success?"

"But we don't know that she threw it in right there in

front of the lodge. She may have gone a long way along the shore and then thrown it. She says she came right back and reported the murder, but how do we know how much time elapsed?"

"I can tell you." At the sound of a new voice Tansy, the two arguing opponents, the entire court, turned, surprised. Cass, shoving his way through the crowd from the back of the room where he had been standing out of Tansy's line of vision made his way past the Press tables and moved towards the witness stand.

"Who are you, sir?" demanded the coroner.

"Cass Hanophy. World Press Service."

A gasp went up. Some of the onlookers and all of the reporters present knew it was Cass who had broken the story of the allocation of the uranium deposits, and unleashed the storm.

"Are you covering this trial for your service?"

"I am. Several of those present can identify me. I should also like to testify. I know something of what happened at the lodge." He barely glanced at Tansy who was told by the coroner she might return to her chair. A court attendant produced a Bible. Cass was sworn and took the witness stand.

"Will you tell us what you know?"

"I will." He proceeded to tell of how he had arrived like other newspapermen at the plantation, hoping to see either the Secretary or Mr. Hutchinson. He, too, had been prevented from approaching the house. "I wandered back down the road and about a quarter of a mile away I was able to get into the grounds. Through a barbed wire fence." A small laugh of recognition rippled through the room. He was not the only one who had tangled with the barbed wire.

"I was walking through the woods," he continued, "when I unexpectedly came to the clearing and the lake. I saw the cabin and was wondering if I ought to go to it—whether or not I'd find anybody there. At that moment I became aware that somebody was passing near me. It was a woman. She didn't see me because I was half hidden by a big honeysuckle bush beside the path. Just as she went by I realized it was Mrs. Bishop."

The coroner pounced like a terrier. "Which way was she going?"

"She was going *towards* the lodge," Cass said calmly.

"And what would you say was her state of mind?"

"I am not a mind reader, sir, but she was walking slowly and seemed thoughtful."

"Not upset? Not angry?"

"Thoughtful, I said."

"Did you call out to her?"

"No. I hadn't expected to see her, and she was by me before I could speak."

"Did she have a gun? Did she have any kind of weapon in her hand?"

"She did not."

"But we know there were guns in the cabin."

"The only ones I saw were rifles and shotguns. Mr. Hutchinson was shot with a .38 automatic."

"Which might easily have been in the room and subsequently disposed of," the coroner said drily. "But continue. What did Mrs. Bishop do after she passed you?"

"She went to the back door of the lodge, knocked, waited a minute, and went inside."

"I see," said the coroner. "And did you see her leave the lodge?"

"I did, but she was running and didn't see me."

"Aha!" The coroner's sharp little eyes lighted. "And how long would you say Mrs. Bishop was inside?"

Cass hesitated. "As long as she herself said. No longer than it would take her to walk into the room, see the body, and hurry out."

"And in that time did you hear a shot?" The courtroom leaned forward and held its breath. There was a second's pause.

"I did not," Cass said.

A corporate sigh was released. The coroner looked discomfited.

"It seems very strange, Mr. Hanophy, if you were as near the lodge as you appear to have been, that you heard no shot." He paused and played his trump card. "Especially in view of the fact that the medical examiner places the death just about the time Mrs. Bishop herself admits to being in the house and, as she says, 'finding the body'."

"It may seem strange," Cass said quietly, "but it is nevertheless true. It is entirely possible, as Mrs. Bishop also surmises, that whoever killed Mr. Hutchinson did it only minutes before I or she arrived on the scene. I believe I am right in saying that the medical examiner has placed the time of death at shortly after ten a.m. Is that correct, sir?" He turned courteously to Mr. Halley, the medical examiner, who had testified earlier, and who, watching the trial of this beautiful woman involving a member of the Cabinet of the United States and one of the world's richest men—of course now he was one of the ex-richest men—was, for the first time since childhood, really living.

"Eh? How's that, suh?"

"I asked if . . ."

Mr. Halley focused his thoughts. "I beg yo' pardon, suh," he said with southern courtesy. "I would say some-time later—possibly between a quarter to eleven and a quarter to twelve. I base my deduction, suh, on the condition of the contents of the stomach at the time of death. The Negro boy, what was his name now . . .?" He riffled through some papers in a big portfolio he held on his lap.

"Joady Sanderson," Cass said.

"Ah, to be sure. Thank you, suh. According to the testimony of this Joady, he had wakened Mr. Hutchinson at five a.m. and a little later given him breakfast. About a quarter to six," he had now found his notes and was reading from them, "he and Mr. Hutchinson went off in the fishing boat." He glanced up. "They caught a real good mess of fish." Laughter in the courtroom. The medical examiner looked embarrassed and returned to his reading. "They got back a little before ten. Mr. Hutchinson said he was hungry and Joady fixed him a second breakfast, frying one of the fish. After that Mr. Hutchinson told him to take the rest of the catch back to the big house. He was then to do some errands for him, which explained why the boy was not in the lodge at the time of the shooting. Joady estimates he left there just about eleven. Mrs. Bishop . . ." he glanced up again at Cass, "and I believe you, suh, claim to have been in the vicinity at eleven-thirty?"

Cass nodded. "Therefore, suh, that testimony coupled, as I say, with the condition of food in the stomach, which bears out the Joady boy's story, sets the time of death between, we may say with a degree of accuracy, between eleven a.m. and a quarter to twelve." The medical examiner

closed his portfolio with the look of a man who has acquitted himself with credit.

"I thank you, sir," Cass said. He turned to the coroner. "In the circumstances which Mr. Halley has so ably detailed for us it is obviously quite possible that someone was at the lodge before Mrs. Bishop got there. He had, in fact, about half an hour in which to see Mr. Hutchinson, shoot him, and get away."

"Under those conditions," said Mr. Woodman, amiably, addressing his remarks to the room at large, "with no weapon, no witness, and no proven motive, it would certainly seem that our distinguished friend's aspersions are unfounded."

Mr. Woodman's comment was perhaps unethical, but his point was made. The coroner glowered, the courtroom laughed, and the tension evaporated. The spectators stirred and started to rise. As far as they were concerned, the inquest was over. The coroner called for order and tried a little longer to keep the suspense going and to sow in the minds of the jury a prejudice against Tansy—politically speaking, should a case of such wide notoriety get to trial it could do him a great deal of good—but within a short time even he had to give up. Cass had convinced the jury. The very fact that though he had known Tansy a long time he had not hesitated to expose her husband when he had proof of his malfeasance in public office proved that he was not prejudiced. Old acquaintance had not prevented him doing his duty. Now, when he defended her, it was because he was convinced of her innocence. Besides, whatever the suspicion, there was no proof. A good many people thought she had a motive, but the evidence was too flimsy to warrant arrest. The inquest had taken three days, but at the end of that time

Tansy Delafield Bishop was released. The coroner's jury found "homicide by person or persons unknown", and let it go at that.

Langdon's attitude was curious. He seemed stunned. That his wife should be implicated in a murder, that he would have to face a Congressional inquiry alone without the inexhaustible backing and strength of Joshua—for even in defection he had refused to believe that Joshua could not in the end be persuaded to support him—seemed to have rendered him temporarily incapable of coherent thought and action. When newspapermen crowded around him at the end of the inquest he said merely that he had no statement and would be returning to Washington immediately to report to the President. Yes, he supposed his wife would accompany him. On the other hand, she had been under great strain. She might need to rest. He really couldn't say.

The newspapers exploded in stories and photographs. It was a journalistic field day. Act One was over. The curtain was about to rise on Act Two. Cast: The Secretary of the Interior, the President of the United States, and a Senate investigating committee. Scene: the nation's Capitol. Expectancy was in the air. It had better be good.

Cass had lied out of love and pity and a sense of guilt, and because it had never occurred to him not to. If Tansy had killed Joshua he had done his best to drive her to it. He could not regret having done his job, but the consequences would haunt him the rest of his life.

Tansy accepted that Langdon must leave for Washington immediately after the inquest. The moment she was released, buttressed by him, Cass, Nora, Mr. Woodman,

and the local police, she was hurried from the courtroom through the crowds into a limousine, and driven back to Crossways.

The reporters followed, but once Langdon had reiterated that he had no further statement to make before seeing the President, and when Tansy refused point blank to talk to anyone but Cass, they swept from the house and the locality. The place was suddenly strangely empty and silent. "God," said Nora, as the last car disappeared down the driveway, "they remind me of a flock of crows surging away from a cornfield."

"Not that I care one way or the other, but I should have thought the family reactions would have been important to them," Mrs. Hutchinson remarked with wounded dignity as, pointedly ignoring Miss Bailey, she turned from the front door and walked into the drawing room flanked by her son and daughter and children in law.

Joshua's wife had arrived at Crossways from Paris the Tuesday following his death. The French couture had obviously acted with dispatch, for she was attired in richly simple widow's weeds and was photographed, flanked by her children, beside the casket, and gave an edifying interview on the rewards of a long and faithful marriage. Since it was some thirteen years since she had seen her husband she could be forgiven her misapprehension of his mode of life.

Joshua's son and daughter knew Nora slightly, and liked her. Though their acquaintanceship with Tansy was also slight she too was popular with them. They had been appalled by her involvement in their father's murder, and reacted with open satisfaction when Cass's testimony turned the tide in her favour and absolved her of suspicion.

Mrs. Hutchinson, from the moment she arrived, had

wanted Tansy and Nora ousted from the premises, but since, between sessions of the inquest, Tansy was kept under house detention and no one else was allowed to leave either, she had, perforce, to put up with them.

The first evening of her arrival the household had gathered in the library before dinner. Tansy, Langdon, Nora, and Woodman at one end of the long room, Marvin Con-sidine, Jake Greenleaf, and the Hutchinsons, *en famille*, at the other. "I suppose that one has to stay," Mrs. Hutchinson murmured in a loud stage whisper, indicating Tansy, "but can't *that* one go to a hotel?" She pointed at Nora with an ageing ring-laden hand.

"Mother, be reasonable," said her son. "There isn't a room in the entire township. Reporters are sleeping in the school-house as it is. Where would you have them go, even supposing they could?"

Mrs. Hutchinson gave a flounce and downed her cocktail. "I should think your father's murderer and his mistress would have earned your enmity, but apparently not. Apparently you're more devoted to them than to your own mother."

"Ma, take it easy. Nothing's been proved about Tansy, and Miss Bailey is more miserable than we are. Just make the best of it. It'll only be for two or three days, and after all, you didn't have to come." "I like that," she whispered shrilly. "My own husband murdered, and his own son is so heartless as to . . ."

"Mother," broke in her daughter, "you hadn't seen Dad in a hundred years. Josh is quite right. Please don't make it any harder than it is." Mrs. Hutchinson subsided, muttering, into her bourbon on the rocks, and for the time the inquest lasted contented herself with ostentatious shudders

on the few occasions she encountered Tansy, and treated Nora as though she were empty air.

Her period of martyrdom had now terminated. When she saw Tansy at the house after the inquest, amid the flurry of farewells, she observed that she didn't know if one congratulated a person on being acquitted. "I mean, it isn't exactly like an engagement or something, is it? But anyway, it's nice they don't think you're guilty." Suddenly overcome, she placed a hand delicately over her eyes. "Oh, that terrible thing. If you didn't do it, I don't know who did. Well, one must keep a stiff upper lip, mustn't one? Goodbye, oh, and good luck on the investigation. It never rains but it pours, does it?"

"Mother, come *on*." Her son propelled her by the elbow out of the doorway and into the waiting car. The Hutchinsons and Jake Greenleaf, accompanying the coffin, were catching the night train north. The funeral was to be in New York in two days, thus enabling Mrs. Hutchinson to get back to Paris in time for the important opening of Claude Daudet, a young designer whose dressmaking establishment she was sponsoring financially. "It's *the* event of the season," she had explained to Greenleaf, "and I've *got* to be there."

As Jake was going out of the door Langdon stopped him. "Will I be seeing you in Washington?" The older man gave him a thoughtful look. "I shouldn't imagine so," he said. "I don't quite see where I'd fit in."

"You may be surprised," Langdon said.

Jake looked amused. "Do you know, I doubt that," and he stepped jauntily across the veranda, down the steps, and into the car.

Tansy went upstairs with Langdon to help him pack.

He was leaving at once for Washington; she would join him in a day or so. Exhausted by the ordeal just past, apprehensive of what lay in store, they were like two somnambulists. They moved jerkily; they spoke little.

"You'll be staying at the house?" Tansy asked. Langdon nodded. "I'll probably have a couple of lawyers in the guest room. All right?"

"Of course. And Langdon, don't worry. We'll pull through somehow."

"I wish I had your crystal ball," he said cuttingly. "This recent imbroglio isn't going to help us any."

"I don't know. It may. You sounded very sincere on the stand when you were defending my character, and these last few days you haven't made me feel you had much confidence in me. Just do as much for yourself and you'll have no trouble."

"What is that? Sarcasm?"

She faced him steadily. "You do think I'm innocent, don't you, Lang?"

He threw a handful of ties into the suitcase. "All I say, Tansy, is I wish to Christ you'd never got involved in this, and it would look a hell of a lot better if they could have pinned it on somebody else."

She stared at him as he closed and fastened the bag. Half way to the door he stopped, set it down, and came back to her. He took her in his arms roughly and kissed her. "Good-bye," he said. "Goodbye." Then he was gone. Numbly, Tansy walked to a chair and sat down. She sat there without moving, without thinking, till she heard a knock on the door. "Tansy, it's me, Nora. Cass is downstairs. He wants to see you."

"Oh," Tansy said vaguely. "Oh, yes. I want to see him."

I'm coming." She opened the door and they went downstairs together. At the foot of the stairway Cass was waiting for them, a tall brunette highball in his hand. "Go into the morning room, why don't you?" Nora said. "I'll see no one disturbs you."

"For once, in a way, the task won't be arduous," Cass said. "You'd think we had the black plague around here, it's so peaceful."

Nora smiled faintly. "This time the rats got it wrong. They left just as the ship was salvaged."

"Here," Cass handed Tansy the drink. "Have a little of Dr. Hanophy's celery tonic. I think you can use it."

They went into the morning room, shadowy now with late twilight. Tansy took a sip of her drink, set it down and turned to him. "Thank you, Cass. Thank you for telling the lie and for saving my life."

"What I said didn't make all that difference."

"I think it did. If the jury and the coroner hadn't believed you I should have had to go to trial. I might have had a bad time in a formal court, and I know what the punishment for murder is."

"Why do you say I lied," he asked. "I saw you going towards the cabin."

She looked at him shrewdly. "I don't think so. If you had seen me then you would have called to me." He was silent. "You also said you didn't hear a shot, but that you saw me run out of the lodge."

"That's right."

"Yet they happened within minutes of each other. You must have heard the shot, Cass, and you must have seen my dress. Covered with blood. You lied very handsomely for me, my Cleveland friend. Dear Dante."

"Oh, God, Tansy," he said miserably, "are you trying to make me believe you did shoot Josh?"

She stared out the window at the gathering evening. "His death wasn't entirely unmerited, would you say?"

"It was a public service. But I . . . I can't think of you as the implement." He paced up and down the room. "If anybody's responsible for what happened to him, I am. I know that. I was so hell bent on exposing fraud, but I never thought . . . I never dreamt . . ."

"Poor Cass. Rugged are the ways of the righteous."

"What are you going to do about Langdon, Tansy?"

There was a pause before she answered him. "I don't know. There's a good deal between us that has to be explained."

"Do you love him?"

"I don't know that either."

"Are you going back to Washington?"

"Yes."

"Oh, Tanse . . . my darling, you look so tired. Won't you go away some place and rest?"

"I should like to go to the bottom of a well, but I'm afraid any blessed dark retreat is a long way off." She laughed, but it was a dreary little sound. "Josh was right about one thing. He said once that any time a person got all this great, gorgeous, blazing publicity centred on him he couldn't get on with his job, and he'd end up with a Senate investigation and then God help him. He wanted none of it."

"I imagine not," Cass said drily.

"I'll go away some place when it's over. However it comes out."

"Will I be seeing you, Tansy?"

"I imagine you'll be seeing more of Langdon."

"Why?"

"You'll be covering the investigation, won't you?"

"No. I am retiring from the story."

She looked at him quizzically. "Do you think you should? It's your baby, after all."

"Please, Tansy. I haven't any right to ask for mercy, I know, but please don't rub it in."

They were silent while she took two or three swallows of her drink. "We've talked enough about me," she said, putting down the glass. "It's nice to have plans, and since I haven't any, none that are very attractive anyway, let's talk about yours."

"Thank you, no. I used to burgeon with them, but they've turned out to be not so hot. I think from here in I shall give up being Mr. Fixit. Things can damn' well take their course without an assist from me."

"You feel that way now, Cass, but you won't always. You'll be full of vigour again and the crusading spirit."

"God forbid."

"No. I want you to be. It's part of you. Don't feel unhappy about this. Things might have gone on a little longer, but they were bound to be discovered sometime. This way, Langdon may not be too badly off. Whatever any of them might have intended . . . Lang or Joshua or Jake . . . they haven't had time to do much damage. Forget about it, Cass. You've got all kinds of good things in your life. Your work, your little boy . . . who knows? Maybe if you try hard enough you and your wife can make a go of it."

"God damn the war," Cass said passionately.

She looked startled. "Whatever are you talking about?"

"If it hadn't been for the war you and I would have been married and none of this horror would ever have happened."

"Oh. Well . . . that was another world, I guess, and two other people." She held out her hand. "Goodbye, Cass. I'll remember all my life what you did for me today and bless you for it."

"But, Tansy, this isn't the end for you and me. When will I see you again?"

"I don't know. I don't know anything at all." She withdrew her hand gently. She turned away from him and went over to the window and leaned her throbbing head against the pane.

"Tansy, are you all right?"

She nodded without speaking. He waited, but she didn't turn around again, and a moment later he left the room.

Eleven

THERE had been a shout, a scream of brakes, and a jolting crash, and Cass Hanophy emerged from his first car accident with a gash in his forehead and a broken left arm.

It was of concern to him but no more than routine procedure at Rome's Ospedale della Santa Croce, an Italian clinic that ranked high in fracture cases. Considering the way the Italians drove Cass considered it a marvel that he had waited a month for his first accident. That was the length of time he had been in Rome on his new assignment, Italian Correspondent for World Press Service. It was a dream come true, but he was somewhat embittered that his first stop-press bulletin to the home office should have been the idiotic item that he had broken his arm. Somehow it made him sound not quite bright.

The young Italian doctor who took care of him assured him it was a bagatelle, that in a mere six weeks he would be as good as new. Cass adapted to the "mere" as best he could. In the meantime he was to come to the hospital for frequent therapy.

On a golden morning in the spring of 1757 he made his way for the third time down the broad corridors of the hospital. He was beginning to feel at home there and was getting on friendly terms with the staff. The doctors were Italian and so were most of the sister-nurses but a good percentage of the non-medical personnel were Americans and, oddly enough, Germans. The latter having arrived

during the war in the equivocal role of hostile allies had fallen in love with the country and stayed on. In the hospital they earned a living as kitchen workers and accountants. A few were nurses.

As Cass continued down the sunny corridor he saw two women in conversation. They were at a desk set in a kind of alcove where the corridor widened. Even at a distance he recognized Sister Maria Antonetta, her seamed leathery face dark against her white habit. She was an amiable old buzzard and in the brief time he had been coming for treatment Cass had grown fond of her.

The other woman had her back to him. She wore a simple dress with the sleeves rolled up and an apron. Cass took her to be a nurse's aide. She was slender with short dark hair and even without seeing her face he judged her to be much younger than the nun.

Sister Maria Antonetta's usually humorous face was serious. She seemed to be urging her companion to some course of action. She was voluble and Cass had no chance to hear the other woman speak but as he drew near them his step slowed. He was struck by something curiously familiar in the silhouette before him. She sat on the edge of the desk, propping herself on her arms outstretched behind her. Cass's glance fell to her left hand and he stopped in his tracks. My God! he thought, it's not possible. And yet it had to be. On what other hand those three jewels, the wrist-watch, the wedding band, and the magnificent ring of modern design in gold and diamonds.

Sister Antonetta spotted him. "Ah, buon giorno, Signor Hanophy, come esta? Better, hein? I hope, I hope. He is here, cara," she continued, "our American I was telling you of last night." The other woman did not turn but her

body stiffened slightly. "Hanophy?" she said softly. "What Signor Hanophy might that be?"

He would have recognized the voice in Kamchatka. "The same," he said. "Uncle Cass in person." And as she still did not move, "Aren't you going to turn around? It's been ten years."

She turned then, she twisted on the desk and she was looking up at him, the small face, the incredible blue eyes within reach of his hand.

"Cass, hello."

"Hello, Tansy," he said, and again, after a moment, almost questioningly, "Hello, Tan." If she noticed his change of expression she gave no sign, but Cass had received a shock. He felt like a man who opens the door to a bright familiar room filled with furniture and pictures and ornaments that he knows by heart and finds it empty.

Beside them Sister Antonetta cawed like a delighted crow. "But you know each other! Always people laugh when I ask if one American knows one another. It is so big, they say, you should see Texas, they say, *ma e possibile* . . . two Americans can know each other."

"Yes, oh, yes," Cass said, "Quite well. How are you, Mrs. Bi——" She broke in before he could finish the name. "I work here. I use my own name professionally, Conway. You must have forgotten."

"I'm sorry. How are you, Miss Conway?" Where did that come from? There was a little click in his memory. Oh, of course, it had been her mother's maiden name. Why had she taken it, he wondered, yet immediately suspected the answer. His mind leaped back to that southern spring in 1747 when not only in the United States but throughout the world the name Tansy Delafield or Tansy Bishop had

been a household word. Before he could say anything the nun interrupted.

She was explaining the kind of treatment Signor Hanophy was getting and the angels would bless Tansy if she would administer it today, she, Sister Maria Antonetta, not wishing to slight the blessed Lord but she could give him only five minutes in chapel as it was, what with the two new fractures and that devil's offspring Pietro Montoni on Ward Two. She hurried away, her veil flapping behind her like a great white bird.

Tansy stood up. "Cass! Cass Hanophy, where did you drop from?"

"I might ask you the same. I'm a newspaperman, remember? We get around, but what about you? What's this rig?" He pointed to her uniform.

"I work here," she said quietly. "I'm not a nurse but I work in the social service department. I follow through on the patients after the doctors have dismissed them, make sure they have the right living conditions for convalescence, things like that. Usually they don't, poor souls."

"What's this about you giving me therapy?"

"I do a little of that, too. We're understaffed."

He stood and stared. "My God, Tansy, do you know how long it's been?"

"I think so. That year was starred in my memory book. Nineteen forty-seven, wasn't it?"

"It was."

"Cass?"

"My dear?"

"You will remember the Miss Conway, won't you?"

"Of course. I won't ask *why* you changed—I imagine I know—but when?"

"Oh, soon after . . . after it all happened. Your colleagues hounded me so assiduously I had to take cover in some way. But never mind that. What about you? Are you badly hurt?"

"No. It's a nuisance and it's painful but the quack says I'm doing fine. Hell, it's the greatest thing that ever happened if it means I can see you. How long have you been here, Tansy? Where do you live? My God, there are a million things I want to ask you. I've only been here a month but I thought I'd heard about most of the American colony. It's incredible I didn't know you were in Rome. Why haven't I seen you here at the hospital?" Suddenly he stopped. "Hey! Didn't you know about me? Coming here, I mean?"

"No, I . . . I've been out of town. I only got back last evening. Sister Maria Antonetta just mentioned that an American had been in with a fractured arm."

"Then that's why I haven't seen you?"

"Of course." Cass couldn't have told quite why but he was convinced she was lying. The accident had been about ten days ago and he had come immediately to the hospital. If she had a regular job there it seemed curious that she would have been away all that time, but if she knew and had not come to see him . . . he felt hurt and a little angry. "Where have you been?" he asked, and his voice rang more harshly than he intended. She looked surprised. "I've been in Florence and Milan. I had to go on hospital business." That was true, but he was right in his suspicion. Tansy had seen his name on the register when he was admitted to the hospital, yet she deliberately left town without seeing him. Her first instinct had been to do so but even as she moved towards the emergency ward her automatic defence against

the past went into action. An almost tangible wall of self-protection surrounded her. Let me not revive it, let me forget it forever, she prayed and her prayer was answered. An indifference born of habit, a comforting familiar sense of lassitude settled over her. Suddenly it was easy not to see her old friend, she truly did not want to.

The prolonged strain of the scandal, the inquest, and the subsequent Senate investigation had been a profound shock. It was as though an electric current that animated her emotions had been severed. She reacted physically and intellectually to life but her capacity to feel had been paralysed.

She smiled at Cass kindly. "Come," she said, "there's a room on the next floor with a balcony. It's empty just for today and you can have it." She led him down the hall to the self-operating elevator. The doors opened as they reached it, a sister stepped out and they got in, and Tansy pushed the button for the floor above. "You'll be peaceful up here," she said, "and you can rest." They left the elevator and a few steps down the hall she opened the door of a bright, sunlit room. "Here we are, come along and lie down." She removed his coat from the shoulder of his damaged arm and slipped the sleeve down on the good one. They went out on to the balcony and she helped him to lie down on an army cot so that his head was in the shade but the sun flooding down on his arm could warm and heal his fractured bone.

"I'm supposed to have diathermy," he said, "and massage."

"I know. Sister Antonetta explained to me."

"Will you come back and give it to me?"

"I can't today. I have to write out the report of my trip.

There's a board of directors meeting this afternoon. It must be ready for them."

As she turned to go he caught her left hand. "Damn it all, Tansy, can't you stay a minute? There are a thousand things I want to talk to you about. What's happened since . . .?"

Unconsciously his glance strayed to the watch and the two rings. Tansy looked at him looking at them. "Please don't ask me to stay now, Cass. I truly can't."

"Okay, then. How about dinner tonight? *You* haven't taken the veil along with the rest of the sisterhood. You must get out of this cloister sometime?"

"Yes, of course. Only tonight . . ."

"You have a date of six weeks' standing."

"Not exactly. It's just that . . ."

"Will you or will you not have dinner with a chum you've known since girlhood and haven't seen in ten years? A chum, furthermore, who is wounded and ill among the alien corn."

Tansy smiled down at him. "You look to me a pretty healthy invalid but . . ."

"You'll come?"

"I'll come." She gave him her address and promised to be ready at eight when he said he would pick her up. When she had gone Cass lay back on the army cot and with the warmth penetrating his bones fell into a state of suspended animation, half doze, half reminiscence.

He was brought back abruptly to the present when a strange young woman with pimples on her forehead and a loud rasping voice came to lead him to the diathermy room. She pulled switches in expert fashion and gave him a workmanlike massage, assuring him in Teutonic English that the

pain inflicted was a sure sign the bones were healing. Normally Cass would have taken an active dislike to her. Today he was barely aware she was there. He got his shirt and jacket on again and took a taxi back to his apartment, half oblivious of the ancient landmarks, the splashing fountains, and the crowded streets. His thoughts reverted to the harrowing events of ten years before and to the time since, the lost time he was eager to learn about.

What had happened since he last saw her in the quiet darkening room? Since she had given him her hand and turned wearily away to lean against the window and let him go without a word? In all the years between, whenever he smelled gardenias—they stood in great tubs outside on the terrace—he thought of that slender forlorn figure, and heard her voice, "I'll remember all my life what you did for me today, and bless you for it."

Once in that long interval there had been a clipping from a San Francisco paper mentioning her in connection with the Government scandal of nineteen forty-seven, and later he had heard she was in India, and once a friend, another newspaperman, said he was sure he had seen her at an obscure little inn in the hills back of Vence, and that was all.

Today, for the first time, she was no longer a rumour. She was here. He could touch her and talk to her. He was dining with her tonight.

Later, as he shaved in preparation for the evening, he felt a quickening of interest, yet there was something lacking. Was that lack in himself, he wondered, or in her?

He stared into the mirror. Let's face it, Mac, he thought, the thrill has gone. We're ten years older, both of us. It's

better this way. Yet he felt cheated. Tansy had always exerted a power over him. She generated a kind of excitement, a heightening of his sensibilities, a sharpening of his reactions. In her company life was always more so. Gayer, more exciting and, at the end, more poignant than with anyone else. But even in the pain there had been vitality. That was what he missed this afternoon. She had seemed curiously apathetic. Courteous, kind, beautiful, and a little dead.

He finished dressing and when he drew up in a taxi in front of her apartment at the appointed time she was waiting for him. It was an old building and she stood by the small door cut into the heavy studded wooden gate that gave on to the courtyard and was opened only when a private car or delivery van drove through.

They decided to dine at the Trattoria Romulo across the Tiber and they sat out in the garden against the old brick wall. The restaurant cat curled on top of the wall and looked down at them with bright unblinking eyes. Throughout dinner the conversation was friendly but sporadic. They reminisced about their youth in Cleveland—that was safe and lasted till dessert when the waiter reached up into the ancient grape arbor that roofed the garden and cut down two bunches of the pale moon-coloured fruit and laid them on their plates. The simple ceremony charmed Cass who reflected that American efficiency experts might take a grape leaf from this simple Italian book on how to get the product from producer to consumer in jig time.

He watched Tansy pull her grapes off one by one and eat them slowly, savouring the flavour. That, thank God, was one thing that had not changed, her enjoyment of food. Everything else about her was . . . not different exactly, but

changed. Not her appearance so much, she looked if anything younger than when he had last seen her when she had been under appalling strain. Now she seemed rested. Her voice was the same and so was the rather serious expression that could be lit suddenly by a smile piercingly sweet. That was it, that's what was missing, Cass thought, the light. She smiled, she had even laughed through dinner, but it was mechanical.

Talking to her was like talking to someone in a trance.

Studying her in what he hoped was a veiled fashion Cass saw her glance across his shoulder and smile with a slight inclination of the head at someone sitting behind them. He turned and saw, a couple of tables away, a party of four, two men and two women. One of the men seemed to be telling a story and the women were laughing. The other, a man in his middle fifties Cass judged, with greying hair and dark eyes was looking at Tansy. As Cass watched he unobtrusively raised his wine-glass and with the barest gesture in her direction lifted it to his lips.

"A friend?" Cass inquired. Her glance came back to him. "An Italian. I met him soon after I got here."

"Have you made many friends in Rome?"

"A few. A hospital is a good place for making friends."

Cass nodded in the direction of the other table. "Is that where you met *him*?"

"Yes." He rather hoped she would volunteer the name but she lapsed into one of the frequent silences that beset their conversation and the sense of remoteness from her he had felt all evening deepened. Cleveland was all very well but it had brought them back to New York and Georgia. Back to Langdon Bishop and Joshua Buell Hutchinson, the area that was full of holes to be skirted and black-out areas

that must be by-passed, since it is difficult for a man to say, even to an old friend, especially if she is a woman whom he once adored and is by no means sure he is not still in love with, "Did you commit the murder?"

As if sensible of her retirement from him and wanting to put him more at ease Tansy broke the silence. "Well! There must be lots more for us to say. We've done nothing but talk about Cleveland."

"It seemed safest," Cass said drily.

"Let's talk about Nora. Have you seen her recently?"

"Not in a good three years, I'd say, not since she and Dale Burgess moved out to San Francisco."

"I hear from her from time to time. It's marvellous how happy she and Dale are. That marriage has worked out beautifully, and judging from their pictures the twins are charmers. Funny, I somehow never thought of Nora as a mother but she's perfect. She says she feels like their grandmother when she meets the mothers of all their little friends, but that's crazy. She's wonderful fun. We used to . . ." She stopped.

"You used to what?" Cass asked.

"We used to laugh so much before . . . well, even when Josh was behaving badly there was something funny about those looney dames he was always taking up with."

Cass felt they were making a little progress. It was the first time all evening she had mentioned Joshua and that period of her life. Perhaps he could effect a thaw after all. "Look, Tanse, come on back to my apartment for a drink. I've got a nice place. We'll be more comfortable and we can talk."

But she shook her head. "Not tonight, Cass. I have to be at the hospital very early in the morning but I'll be

grateful if you'll walk me home. It's a lovely night. I'd like the exercise."

With a slight feeling that he was the villain foiled Cass called for the check. As they were threading their way through the tables in the garden to go back into the restaurant and out on to the street he noticed that Tansy's Italian friend stopped in his conversation and followed her with his eyes until she had gone through the door. As they were crossing the Tiber they stopped and stood leaning over the bridge watching the moonlight in the flowing tide.

"Funny," he said, "the last time I watched moonlight on a river this way it was on the Potomac and do you know who I was with?" She shook her head. "Lawrence MacNamara. It must have been in forty-nine or fifty. His wife, she was half crazy you know, had died of an overdose of dope and old Parsons resigned as Secretary of State after the President was re-elected. He finally let Sheila get a divorce and she and Mac were going to be married. He'd come down to Washington and I was there on a job and we happened to run into each other. We'd had dinner together and we were taking a stroll afterwards, just like this, and shooting the breeze about the bad old days and we walked along the Potomac and it was moonlight, like this."

Tansy ran her finger back and forth along the balustrade of the bridge. "Cass, speaking of the bad old days, whatever happened to Jake Greenleaf? He might be President, for all I know, I've been so terribly out of touch."

Cass laughed. "Well, he hasn't quite made that, but I'm afraid MacNamara never was able to get back at him and it was too bad because if ever a son of a bitch deserved to be knifed it was he, but after Joshua . . . well, after the trouble at Crossways and the investigation and all our boy

lay low for a while and the next thing you know he popped up pretty much in control of the somewhat reduced Federal Coal and Uranium interests, but still feeling no pain financially, and as far as I know right this minute and at seventy-two, which is about what he must be, he's rocking away very comfortably on a few million a year. It's not a gratifying thought."

Tansy sighed. "There has to be another world, don't you think, where people get their come-uppances? Otherwise, it's just too unjust to bear."

"We can hope," Cass said. They leaned together looking down into the water, their shoulders touching. "Tanse," he said finally, "do you mind if we go back to the beginning? Or rather to the end? What happened after the Senate investigation? I said I wasn't going to cover it, but W.P.S. wanted me to and I did."

"Yes," she said, "I know."

"When it was over I tried desperately to see you, but you pulled the most complete disappearing act I've ever known. You absolutely vanished from view. Where did you go?"

"I went to India."

"India!"

"It was a long way away, that's why."

"I heard a rumour that you were there, but I couldn't believe it."

"Nora and I went together. She was absolutely marvellous to me. I had very little money, but that's one thing Joshua *had* done for her; he'd made good investments so that she'd always be reasonably well off. She lent me the money and we went on a long trip. Incidentally, that's when I started using mother's maiden name. But do you

know, even in India I was recognized? They'd had the story in the English language papers and had used pictures. Your profession is ubiquitous. We were in India longer than we'd planned, really, because I got ill. I was ill a lot those next few years. I travelled a lot, too. I found it was better not to stay too long in one place—people are very curious—but I was a mess. I had ulcers, I had colitis, God knows what. Finally, a little over four years ago, I came to Rome."

"How did you happen to get involved with the hospital?"

"How does anyone get involved with a hospital? I was there for a couple of months as a patient, and they were so kind to me, so helpful, that when I recovered I didn't want to leave them. I asked for a job. I'm well at last. I can do it. You can't think how wonderful that is."

It was the longest speech he had heard her make. When she had finished Cass asked abruptly, "Are you happy?" She hesitated. "I'm content. It's already a great deal."

"But is it? And are you really well? I doubt if you know. I think you're numb. You're practising a sort of auto-hypnosis. You can hardly call that health."

Leaning on the bridge she turned and stared at him, and although it passed as quickly as it came in her eyes was a momentary flash of fear. It was a brutal remark, he supposed, and he had meant it brutally. He longed to shock her back to life. Her momentary fear brought him hope. Perhaps she *could* be reached.

They crossed the bridge and continued walking in the direction of her apartment. "I think we've had plenty of me, why don't we talk about you?" she said quietly. "You

haven't mentioned your wife or son. Are they with you?"

"I have no wife," Cass said. "We were divorced in nineteen fifty-one. Young Cass goes to Lawrenceville. If I'm still here this summer I think he'll come over for his vacation."

"Is there any chance you may be going home soon?" Tansy asked. It struck Cass that her voice held the first note of enthusiasm he had heard all evening. He observed coldly that he hoped to stay in Rome for several months and in Europe more or less indefinitely. "Of course," he added with what he trusted was cutting sarcasm, "there is always a chance that war will break out in the Middle East or that some major catastrophe at home will call me back. Don't despair."

She did not seem to find this amusing and they continued along the dark streets in silence. When they reached her apartment he noticed a man strolling up and down the pavement opposite. As the light from the street lamp fell on him Cass was sure it was the man to whom Tansy had nodded in the restaurant.

They waited until the *portiera* opened the small door in the big one. It was apparent to Cass that he was not going to be invited up for a nightcap so he said goodbye on the sidewalk, asking if they might not dine together the following evening. Although half expecting it he was a little offended by her gentle refusal. They were old friends thousands of miles' from home. It wouldn't have hurt her . . . He said good night and walked slowly away. After he had gone a few yards he turned back. The man who had been strolling on the opposite side of the street crossed the road and rang the bell. The little door opened in a moment and he slipped quickly inside.

The next day, although actually his day to skip a treatment, Cass went to the hospital in the hope of seeing Tansy. Whom he saw first was Sister Maria Antonetta. Considering she was leading a life dedicated to celibacy, Sister Antonetta, he was charmed to note, had the instincts of a Jewish *shadchen*. "Caro Signor Hanophy," she shrilled happily as she saw him coming into the physiotherapy department. "Welcome. Come esta?" Cass shrugged. "Not so well, eh? Bene, bene. In need of a little special treatment, perhaps? At the hands of la bella Signora Conway? In cases like this old friends are best, non e vero? Wait a bit. She is busy, la bella, but I give an order. I tell her it is her duty to help with the massage of a compatriot." And with a prodigious wink she departed, veil flapping. Cass chuckled. Ribald old coot. She had looked positively lecherous as she mentioned massage.

Tansy came in shortly afterwards and set him to exercising with weights and pulleys. Her manner was pleasant but professional. They might have been meeting for the first time. They even got to the massage but this contact which Sister Maria Antonetta had obviously envisaged as pleasurable had all the voluptuous overtones of an International Business Machine.

When they were finished Tansy said, "I think you'll be feeling a good deal better. When you come in next time you'll probably see Miss Schmidt, she took care of you yesterday. Ask her please to give you the same treatment."

"Schmidt? Is that the pimply browed Amazon? She scares me."

There was the tiniest twitch at the corner of her mouth but Tansy said soberly, "She is one of the most able people in the hospital. You'll be lucky to get her."

"What about you?" he demanded. "Aren't you going to be here?"

"I expect to be out a good deal for the next few days. We're dismissing four of our ward patients, none of them is well off, and I have to see what arrangement can be made for the continuation of their treatment at home. Goodbye, Cass."

She held out her hand. He shook it formally but his heart felt heavy. To be in her company and have this strange barrier between them was hard. She walked to the door. As she opened it she turned. "It's wonderful knowing you're here," she said, and she was gone.

Cass took a cab back to the office, his gloom somewhat alleviated by her last remark, but her attitude still puzzled him. Why was she trying to fend him off? Why was . . .? Suddenly he sat bolt upright. Good God, after all these years she wasn't afraid, was she? Afraid that for some fantastic reason he might reverse his testimony about her? Say that he had heard a shot while she was in the lodge? Afraid that he had seen something he had not divulged at the inquest? Was it exposure she feared, was that it? But surely, surely she knew him well enough to know he would never do that.

As the cab neared his office this somewhat melodramatic mood was punctured by the thought that just possibly she was avoiding him not through fear but because she was otherwise involved. The Italians were dedicated to beauty, and Tansy was a beautiful woman. She probably was not languishing alone. Why should he expect it?

As for himself, ever since his divorce—Laurie had fallen in love with a providential automobile man from Detroit and her antipathy to divorce had faded like snow

before sunshine—he had jealously guarded his bachelor life. He had had his share of pretty women but the alliances were for the most part short lived and tenuous. The truth was, Cass had never wanted to marry anyone but Tansy. This time he had found her again, and this time they were both free. The postman might ring twice, but that, Cass suspected, was about his limit. One didn't go on and on missing opportunities. There weren't that many of them.

His emotions, however, were cautious. He didn't care for a repeat performance of the old heartaches. If he allowed himself to fall in love with Tansy all over again he would be doing it deliberately, and this time for keeps. A mature man and woman weren't swept off their feet by a wild romantic seizure. Their love might be a deep and strong current, but it was directed.

Better, he decided, to bide his time. Besides, he hadn't much choice. There was little he could find out about Tansy or her friend until he saw her again. He himself was tied up with dinner parties for the next two nights, but he determined to try to engage her later in the week.

In the days that followed they saw each other with increasing frequency and gradually, very gradually, they began to slip back into their old harmony. The relationship was almost as free and easy as it used to be. Almost, but not quite. There were still areas of restraint between them. There were still question marks.

Cass, Tansy knew, was curious about her life in Rome. Once he had seen her dining with Luca di Almano and the next day when he came into the hospital for treatment shortly after noon he had by chance run into her in the

hallway on her way to the commissary for luncheon. "I'll come too," he said promptly.

"It isn't anything special," she assured him, "and strictly speaking it's for hospital personnel only."

"You pay for the food, don't you?"

"Oh, yes. In that respect it's like a real restaurant."

"Good. I shall treat it as such. I suppose it's real food even if it's not special?"

"It isn't all that bad," she said. "After all, it's Italian and they never go far wrong."

"They do in Ravenna," he said grimly. "Go look at the mosaics and get the hell out. Don't eat there." As they sat over luncheon he asked politely if she had had a pleasant evening.

"Very."

"With your old friend?"

"Acquaintance," she mumbled through wisps of spaghetti. Despite four years in Italy she had never quite mastered it.

"Isn't he the chap we saw in the restaurant the first night we dined together?"

"Is he? I've forgotten." Cass fixed her with a beady eye but she returned his gaze innocently. "May I ask his name?" he inquired.

She hesitated a moment but then she said amiably enough, "Of course. Luca di Almano. He's a Count."

"Well, well, is he indeed."

For some reason she felt on the defensive. "I imagine you think it's childish for the Italians, or the French for that matter, to keep their titles when they have no court, but those family names go back hundreds of years and to them it seems natural."

"Of course," he said pleasantly. "I'm a suave type, I can appreciate that. I'm delighted to see you're doing so well."

"Snob!"

"Not at all. More power to the Count and his classy ancestors. I'd like to meet him sometime. Ask me up when you're giving a little party."

"I don't give parties. I live very quietly."

"Ask me up anyway."

"Cass?" He looked at her with gentle amusement. "What is it?"

"Do you mind not spreading it around the office, that you saw me and di Almano dining together?"

"What do you think I am, a blabber mouth? But is it a secret?"

She flushed a little. "No, but he's well known in Rome and he's a married man."

"I see," Cass said gravely. "You may rest assured I shall not betray your confidence. But as an old friend from Cleveland, why don't you concentrate on bachelors?"

"They're hard to meet." He extended a hand. "Cass Hanophy, aged forty-one, 'eight six feet, eyes light brown, hair nondescript, steady employment. Status bachelor. Meet me."

She began to laugh then and the idea of a party suddenly seemed a good one although she wondered a little how she might manage. She was scarcely in a position to invite the Contessa di Almano and she and Luca had rarely been seen alone together. To ask other Romans when he was at the apartment would be sure to start gossip. Casting about for a solution it occurred to her that he served on the board of the hospital. She would ask two or three other members and a few of the American colony besides Cass and it would seem

perfectly natural. She *would* have a party. Although she did not realize it she looked at him gratefully. For the first time in a long while the idea of a little festivity seemed fun.

And so it had been. She had given the party and it was a success. Now it was over. The guests had gone, the *portiera* who had been pressed into service had returned to her first floor cubicle and Tansy was washing the last glasses and emptying the ashtrays.

Luca and Cass had been very courteous to each other, courteous but wary. Cass, she suspected, was suspicious of di Almano simply because he was Italian. American women thought Italians romantic; American men thought them on the make. It was an ugly phrase and widely at variance with what she knew of Luca.

But if Cass assumed him to be a wolf Luca, on his side, was obviously puzzled by this friendship between the American man and woman. Platonism proved a little complicated for a Latin's realistic approach to sex. Besides, the Count was firmly convinced of it, Americans were sex mad. Look at their movies. Look at their magazines. Look, above all, at their advertisements. Having spent a little time in the States after the war Luca still remembered his astonishment at the idea of half-naked girls in bathing suits advertising beer and automobile tyres.

The gentlemen had tried outwitting each other but had finally departed when the last couple took their leave. Tansy had enjoyed the skirmish but now she felt tired, tired and dispirited. She wished she had a husband. Half the fun of parties were the connubial post mortems when they were over. She sighed as she put away the last of the glasses and replaced the ashtrays. Ten years before her life had broken in two and the best she had been able to retrieve

was a sort of balanced quiescence. It permitted her to live without misery but Cass's words haunted her. "I think you're numb, you're practising a sort of auto-hypnosis." She was thirty-seven, if she was to live again it was time she started, but how? With whom and for what? Dear Luca with his Italian marriage and his Italian wife was not an answer although there was a sweetness in their relationship that made her very grateful. Now, once again, there was Cass, but good companions though they were there was restraint in his manner and he knew about the murder and would not speak of it.

She had heard of women who were marvellously clever with men, who knew how to win and hold them against rivals, against the man's own inclination even, but Tansy had never discovered the secret. There were men in her life but they were there because they wanted to be, so in a way it didn't count. They were not around because she had been clever about ensnaring them. She was pondering on this difference when the doorbell rang. It did not surprise her. Although it was late Luca tended to drop in at all hours. He was a night owl and would sit contentedly talking over a glass of vermouth until two a.m. or he would plead a suit which she had little inclination to resist. Probably he had waited in the neighbourhood until he was sure everybody had left and then come back. She could have wished he had not chosen this moment, she was not in the mood, but he was dear to her and she would make him welcome. She went and opened the door.

Cass stood in the hallway. "Good evening. May I come in?"

She couldn't hide her astonishment. "Cass! I wasn't expecting you."

"Sorry to disappoint you. You were expecting someone else?"

"At this hour? Of course not."

"Oh. I somehow got the impression that our friend the Count was considering a post-party call."

"What an absurd idea."

"May I come in?"

"It's . . . it's very late."

He glanced at his wrist-watch. "Half past twelve. In Cleveland it's half past six. Shank of the evening."

"In Cleveland at this hour the sidewalks have been rolled up. Come on in." She asked him to sit down but he seemed to prefer wandering about the room, a large drawing room opening off a spacious foyer. They were the show features of the apartment, the bedroom and kitchen quarters were small and crowded. Tansy herself referred to her establishment as Queen Anne front and Mary Anne behind but it was all she had been able to find in post-war Rome and it fitted her pocket book.

Cass wandered about looking at the books and pictures and furniture as though he had never seen the place before instead of having just spent the evening. She offered him a drink but he declined. He seemed restless and she was a little nervous, but her nervousness wore off as time passed and she became confident that Luca was not going to pick this evening for one of his nocturnal calls. Finally she said to Cass, who seemed to be finding it difficult to state the reason for his visit, "You've been gone some little time, what have you been doing with yourself? Sitting in a café?"

"No. If you want to know I've been to the Colosseum."

"At this hour?"

"It sounds strange but I wanted to think. I thought the

weight of centuries would give me a perspective so I went and stood there in the moonlight for a while."

She smiled. "And did it help to straighten out your ideas?"

"Yes," he said, "I think it did. At least it helped me to realize that whatever they are in a few years won't matter and that gave me the courage to put them into words." He kicked his foot gently against the leg of the sofa for a minute and then he sat down. "Tanse, I want to talk to you, really talk, I mean. Are you tired?"

"Not especially. And if I am, in a few years it won't matter. What do you want to say?"

"I want to talk about you and Langdon. Oh, I know something about him, of course, that he was sentenced to prison and the sentence was suspended, and that later he hightailed it out of the country and now is, or was, keeping shady political company in South America, but what happened between you and him? I ask because I . . . hell, because I want to know."

"If you want to know I don't mind telling you. Although not very much happened, actually, after . . . well, after Joshua died. Most of it happened before—after I learned from you how Langdon got the Secretaryship. Then came the disclosure of the deal involving the timberland and the uranium deposits. We were finished then, I suppose, but I felt I should stick to him through the investigation, and in a way I still loved him . . . at least I felt desperately sorry for him. For myself too. I simply couldn't bear to see my lovely romantic marriage charred and mangled. Langdon was weak, but Joshua was cold and calculating and ruthless. I was determined he should make good in some way. I was determined he should pay for

something, and I went to see him that day to help Langdon, but to get my own back too."

Her face was hard. For the first time since Cass had known her she seemed harsh and unforgiving. His eyes fell before her cold gaze. He got up and started again his restless pacing of the room, heavy hearted.

Tansy resumed, and gradually her manner softened—she was more herself again.

"Then it happened. Joshua was . . . Joshua died. When you lied for me I was released and didn't have to stand trial, but that's when the end finally came between Langdon and me—back in Washington. I can't blame him, he had troubles enough and he made it very clear that he didn't want a wife who was implicated in a murder. He couldn't afford it, he said. I think I said something to the effect that I couldn't afford a swindler for a husband, and we had the most unholy knockdown drag out row you ever saw. It was not a pretty scene. As I recall, you figured in it quite a lot. Lang pretended, because I don't think for a moment he really believed it, but he pretended to think that you were my lover and that in some way, although he knew what a shock the exposure had been to me, that I knew about the scandal and the mix-up with Hysander that came out during the investigation, and that I'd told it to you. Poor devil, I suppose he was desperate. Anyway, it was the end of us. He asked for a divorce, but he was shrewd enough to realize that coming on top of everything else it wouldn't look very well, so although I didn't see him after that we waited a couple of years and then got one quietly in Mexico."

"As I remember," Cass said thoughtfully, "he didn't finish up too badly from the money point of view."

"No, he didn't. The ways of finance are mysterious. Despite all the hullabaloo and the fact that he was stripped of office and reputation, I think he's kept a good bit of what Joshua gave him that time. When he fled to South America he was not ungenerous. He left me ten thousand dollars."

"Princely," Cass said grimly, "in view of the circumstances."

"Being out of the country he could have got away with nothing, I suppose, so I was grateful. I guess it would have been more noble of me not to have taken it, but that's when I got ill. I couldn't do any work. Then later, when Mother died, she left me a tiny bit of income. Living here in Italy and adding to it what the hospital pays me, I can manage."

"I see. And what do you plan to do with your life from here in?" Cass asked.

She shrugged. "I'll get along."

"It doesn't sound very exciting." Tansy looked at him and her eyes crinkled at the corners in the old beguiling way. "Once upon a time, within a few days, I had enough excitement to last me the rest of my life."

"But, damn it all, you're like some beautiful somnambulist. Don't you want to *live* again?" The smile in her eyes died away and she said wistfully, "It sounds lovely but I know that life, real life, can be very painful and sin, which is so much a part of it, can make one very sad. I don't know why moralists worry so much about punishment; the punishment is inherent in the sin. You don't even have to do a bad thing. If you do a wrong or stupid thing you pay the penalty. It's like playing hookey from school. The punishment is you grow up ignorant. It works that way in everything. But thanks just the same for the suggestion I

live again. I'll give it some thought. It's a friendly offer, Dante." Suddenly she laughed and Cass detected a faint but true echo of the old boom. "You know when I thought of Dante?" she said. "A few weeks ago when you first came to the hospital. I saw your name on the chart and I left that night and went to Florence and then naturally I thought of him and Beatrice, and then I thought of us a long time ago."

"Why didn't you come to see me that day when you knew I was in the hospital?" Cass demanded.

"I . . . I didn't have time. I had to catch a train that same night."

"You had time. Come on, why didn't you?"

"Don't make me say it." He took her by the arms. "Why didn't you?"

"Because I didn't want to start it all up again."

"What all up again?"

"Oh, Cass, I don't know. All the old happy time when I was vulnerable. Beatrice and Dante, and long before."

"You mean long before when you loved me?"

"Yes. No. I suppose so. Oh, Cass, don't *badger* me."

"Ha! Badger! I like that. I try to bring her back to life and Madame is badgered, she says. Well, let me tell you something, I'm going to badger you. I decided tonight right in the middle of the moon-flooded Colosseum that I'd badger the hell out of you, and what's more I'm sick and tired of this palship. Since we're so all-fired Italian why can't we be Romeo and Juliet instead of Dante and Beatrice? Further more, standing there in the Colosseum, I made up my mind. We are now going to do what we should have done eighteen years ago."

"What's that?"

"We are going to get married and you are going to cast off this damn' Lady of Shallot spell and live and laugh and suffer like hell." And he took her in his arms and kissed her long enough and deep enough to make up for the wasted years. When she broke away she was breathless and laughing.

"Darling," she gasped, "darling, you're heaven but you hurt."

"Good," he said, "that's the beginning of your suffering."

"You're awful, Mr. Hanophy, you really are. I do think *once* you might *ask* me to marry you. Not just tell me."

"I tell you now because I'm a mature man and know what's good for us both, but years back when I was a stripling I asked you to marry me."

"You didn't. You *never* did."

"I must have. Sure I did. We were engaged."

"Not officially. It was an assumption. We were in love and you'd say things like, 'when we go to New York,' 'when we're travelling,' or if you saw a brat behave badly you'd say, 'our kids are never going to be like that,' so I assumed we were going to be married, but I never had a proper proposal from you."

"Okay, here goes. Will you marry me?"

She hesitated for a small moment, and she said softly, "Cass, my darling Cass, are you sure you want to? Are you sure you're not just sorry for me?"

"Lady," he said, "I trust I am a man of compassion but I never yet married a woman out of pity and I don't intend to begin now. You're beautiful, you've got a figure that's whistle bait, and you've got the courage of your

convictions. I *want* to marry you. For my health's sake I'll make it my business to keep on the right side of you, but I'll do it because I love you."

She was in his arms, but she broke away from him gently. "Why do you say that?"

"What? That I love you? Because I do. I'll be the perfect husband. I plan to tell it to you often."

"No, no, not that. The part about the courage of my convictions and keeping on my right side."

"Well, honey, after all . . . when you're displeased you show it."

She stepped away from him. She walked to the table and picked up a cigarette and lighted it and put it out. Then she turned. "Cass, sit down." He sat on the sofa, and after a moment she came and sat on a stool in front of him. Her eyes were brimming with tears, but she was laughing a little too. "I never heard of such a man. You think . . . you think I killed Joshua, don't you? And still you ask me to marry you."

Cass took her hands in his. "Tansy, I don't know if you did or not, and I'll never ask you. You had the motive and you had the opportunity and if you did it, who shall blame you? I heard the shot that day and almost immediately afterwards I saw you run by. You looked sick and there was blood on your dress, and then I went in and I found Joshua. At first I thought you had and then I was sure you hadn't, but I couldn't prove you hadn't and there was nobody else who seemed even remotely suspect. Only I had no intention of letting you go to prison. That's why I said I hadn't heard a shot and that I saw you going towards the lodge instead of away from it."

"You perjured yourself."

"Certainly. What kind of a skunk would I have been if I hadn't?"

"It depends on your point of view, I suppose. Yours and Langdon's were different. Cass, do you want me to tell you about the murder?"

"Only if you want to. As far as I'm concerned, the act and your reasons for it, *if* you did it, are as dead and buried as Joshua."

"I want to," she said. "What with the newspaper stories, and the Press ganged up on us at Crossways, Langdon and I were both in a terrible state, but he wanted me to try once more to appeal to Joshua to help him out, so I said I would. That's why I went to the lodge—to talk to him, to plead with him."

"Did you have a gun?"

She looked at him blankly. "Good God, no. I've never handled a gun in my life."

"And did you talk to him?"

She shook her head. "I'd come on the lodge from the rear. There was a screen door at the back and it was open so I went in. I was in a kind of narrow little hallway that led to the big central room. The kitchen was on the left and there were a couple of small servants' rooms on the right. I could see at a glance they were empty but I couldn't see into the big room because there was an old woollen curtain hanging in the doorway. It shut it off from the hall. I was just about to walk the few feet that separated me from it when I heard voices. I stopped for a moment because one of them was Joshua's and the other seemed curiously familiar. For a moment or two I couldn't recall whose it was and then suddenly I knew. It was Andy Hollister. He and I . . ." She stopped.

"Go on, dear. You and he what?"

"I knew him during the war. He was in the Army and when he was on leave in New York he was a beau of mine. He was, in fact, my lover. I was very fond of him. He was always kind and fun."

"Did you see him afterwards?" Cass asked.

"No. Just about the time the war ended he got married. He told me he was going to be and he showed me a picture of his girl. Linda Sue, her name was, and she was very pretty. Andy thought the world of her. That's why it was so terrible, the things he was saying to Joshua. I heard him through the curtain. He said, 'In God's name, why did you have to do it to Linda Sue? You have dozens of other women, why couldn't you have left her alone?' And then Joshua said—and I'll never forget how controlled, how urbane his voice was in contrast to poor Andy—he said, 'May I point out that I didn't *do* anything to Linda Sue that she didn't want done. In fact, I might say that your wife entered into this co-operation with considerable relish.' Well, that did it. Andy said, 'You bastard, I'll kill you for that,' and then there was a funny little sound and Joshua's voice, still smooth, saying, 'I suggest you put that gun away.' He told Andy that if he killed him Andy would be convicted of murder and that it wouldn't bring back his wife. And then he said something like 'I regret the fact of her death but I cannot accept the blame for it. Why are you so sure that I'm responsible for her pregnancy?'

"I realized then that she must have been the girl that Clover Delaney told Nora about, the one who was coming to the plantation when Clover and the other girls were down there that time."

"Did Mr. Hollister say anything more?"

"Yes. He told Josh that he knew he was responsible for her being pregnant because she'd told him so. 'When she was dying she told me,' he said. She said, 'Honey, I'm sorry. I tried to fix it so you wouldn't know. If it had been possible for you to be a father I'd have pretended the baby was yours. You'd have come to love it, but I know what the doctor told us, that you can't ever be a father, so you'd have known the truth. That's why I tried to get it fixed, but something went wrong, I guess.' Andy said she was in terrible pain and he asked her who the man was and then she told him that she'd been to Crossways a few times and it was Joshua and he said, 'And then, Mr. Hutchinson, she died and that's why I'm going to kill you.' For the first time Joshua's voice sounded scared and he offered Andy money, he asked him how much he wanted, and Andy said, 'All your life you've bought your way out of everything but you're not going to buy your way out of this. You killed Linda-Sue as surely as though you'd strangled her with your bare hands,' and Joshua started to say something, and then I heard the shot."

She stopped, and there was a long silence. "Oh, Tansy," Cass said at last. "Oh, Tanse, my darling. Couldn't you have rushed in, couldn't you have stopped it?"

"Cass, I couldn't. I was paralysed. You can't think how frightening it was. Even after I heard Joshua fall I couldn't move. I heard Andy run across the room and I heard the front door open and close. I heard his step on the porch and then silence. When, in a minute, I *could* move, I ran forward and pulled aside the curtain and then I saw him. I saw Josh crumpled up on the floor on his side."

Cass nodded. "Beside the big flat-topped desk, I know."

"I knelt down beside him, his eyes were still open, and I could see the spreading stain on his shirt front. That's when I touched him and got the blood on my hands. It was sticky and I rubbed my hands on my dress without thinking. Then I realized I must get help and I think I called out to see if anybody was around but there was no answer. I ran to the front door and opened it but the path that runs along the river and into the woods was empty. I went back through the house and ran out the back door the way I'd come, and that must have been when you saw me. I was running to get help."

Cass took her in his arms and held her for a long time. "Can you ever forgive me, Tansy? Can you ever forgive me for having been blind and stupid enough to think you might have done it?"

She stroked his face. "My darling, why shouldn't you have thought so? You and some hundred and fifty million Americans were in the same boat."

"But why did you never tell about Andy Hollister?" he asked. "Were you still in love with him?"

"No. That was over long before, but I had reasons. One of them was you."

"Me?"

She nodded, her eyes full of gentle mockery. "You were so full of integrity at that time, exposing Government swindles left and right, subjecting your boyhood sweetheart to the most gruelling kind of pressure . . . it was on the tip of my tongue to tell you after the inquest, back at Joshua's house, but I couldn't be sure you wouldn't go riding off to expose poor Andy."

"I damn' well would have. To clear you."

"That's what I was afraid of. I suppose there's never any

justification for murder, but I felt Andy [^]was justified. Joshua couldn't have *forced* himself on Linda Sue, let's be honest. Maybe, when he said she'd enjoyed their relationship, maybe she had, but he was still at fault. She was young and foolish, he was ageing and rich and powerful. He didn't *need* her. Why, in heaven's name, couldn't he have let her alone? He *was* responsible for her death, and it was as though he'd committed a purely gratuitous murder. There was that, and there was the thing he had done to Langdon and what he intended doing to the public at large. In a way, I felt he deserved to die, and yet, you know, I was fond of him. He could be amusing and generous and, in his own peculiar way, I think he was fond of me."

She looked down at the beautiful ring and moved it back and forth on her finger. "He made me promise that I'd always wear this, and I always shall. I've thought of selling it a couple of times when I've been hard up, but I never will."

Cass smiled. "You're a very loyal girl," he said, touching the wristwatch he had given her long ago. "As I told you once before," she said, "it keeps very good time." He touched her wedding ring. "Why do you still wear this?"

"I've been very lonely at times. It reminds me that once I was happy, that I had a husband I was in love with. I can take it off now." And she did. Cass took both her hands and kissed them. "But, good God, Tanse, supposing your case had gone to trial? Suppose you *had* been convicted of the murder? What then?"

She shook her head. "I'm not very brave, Cass. Had I ever actually feared for my life, had I believed I was in real danger, I'd have told, but I was sure if it ever came to that, Andy would step forward."

"He was apparently perfectly willing to let you take the rap."

Unexpectedly, Tansy laughed. "I don't think it was that so much. I think he was stunned. He didn't even know I was in Georgia, and suddenly I'm accused of a crime he committed. It has its comic side, you will admit."

"Hilarious."

"Besides, the minute you testified for me I knew I was safe, and right after that they let me go, so I was right."

"Did Andy ever try to get in touch with you?"

"I don't know. I left Georgia immediately and it was practically impossible to reach me during the investigation, and as quickly as we could after that Nora and I left for India. I've never been home since."

"I should say Mr. Hollister owes you a good deal. Quite possibly his life."

"Let's forget about Mr. Hollister, shall we? Let's concentrate on us."

"I'm for that," he said. He kissed her, but though the kiss was eminently satisfactory she could tell that something still troubled him. "All right, what is it?"

"Nothing, nothing," he assured her.

"Come on, I know there is."

"Well, I was wondering . . . Count di Almano, for instance."

The smile in her eyes died. "He's a dear man, Cass, and a tragic one. He's been a good friend to me since I've been in Italy, and I'm devoted to him."

"He seems attractive, but why tragic?"

"He's dying and he doesn't know it. They told me at the hospital. He has a progressive disease of the connective tissue for which there's no cure. I learned about it the day I

first saw you. That's what Sister Maria Antonetta was telling me when you came down the corridor. Poor Luca, he knows he's ill, but he doesn't know what it is. I should like to keep on being friends with him, Cass. He's married, of course, but he depends on me, rather. It's because I work at the hospital and he's on the board of directors. It's a professional kind of feeling."

"I see. Well, I'm the last to want to break a professional bond. I'm a working man myself."

"You're good and dear and I love you," she said gratefully.

"You will forgive my curiosity, but has there ever been anything between you and the Count other than friendship?"

"My darling," she said, "it must be nearly dawn, and I have answered quite enough questions for one night."